

Lesley Battler | Journal | 1985



Journal archive project

Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

Vol. 5, 1985

Organizations and associations – As BHCL Turns – Colin Browne – Astrology and literary readings – A writers' group – A head-on collision and fatality – Traumatic death – I attempt to support a bereaved friend – Painful reunions.

Jan. 2-4

For the entire week only four of us have been in the office; Mary, Ken, Kevin and me, and since it's been freezing cold, we've basically done nothing except huddle in my area because it's the warmest, talking about the abortion issue, movies, different types of wood, wild animals we have seen. Today we talked about a cruel teacher Mary had to suffer at a school in England.

Ken and I sat by the window and talked about communism and nuclear war. One thing Ken and I agreed on was that when you feel something is wrong you should be able to say it. You have to be able to say NO even if it's not out loud, but in your heart or in your actions. I would not be capable of making a speech, but I could write it in a story. In spite of the rise of all forms of technology and telecommunication, the proliferation of meaningless language, I still believe in the written word and its power to influence. I think history shows that powerful narratives change the world.

The most important thing is to remain open and receptive. It is so easy to become fixed though. A fixed opinion is like a house or an anchor. We are so ephemeral. The darkness exists all around each one of us with our lives as small and unsteady and full of motion as one headlight moving along a highway at night. We all need a refuge and I think for a lot of people, opinions become protective, often as impenetrable as old fortresses.

Mary is an interesting woman. Dreamy, imaginative, yet she is always questioning and analyzing in a very abstracted manner. She's a Virgo; health and nutrition come up all the time in conversation with her. You never know where the conversation will meander with her.

Today she talked about her son Michael who is a lawyer now, and how he went into a depression while he was a McGill student. Mary feels she has learned from watching him, and looks for signs of it in her daughter, Jennifer. Mary has had a few rows with Bob over the way he does things. The first big row was over how he wanted her to do the book-keeping. It was not a proper way and she rebelled! Even Claire wouldn't venture near the "arena." Mary, who appears so genteel, makes Bob back down every time.

Speaking of Bob, he rented those paintings on the BHCL walls from Stewart Hall and didn't return them. The Stewart Hall people called and called. Finally Mary got him off the hook by telling them he was forgetful and "gormless." Of course, Mary doesn't think she is particularly clever. Every woman I know underestimates her intelligence. Mary likes my style and we have good talks about books.

Kevin, Mary and I discussed John Fowles's *The Magus*. When Bob is away, everyone is laid-back and the feeling is nice, full of camaraderie. When the volatile ones, Bob, Claire and Howard are away the rest of us have some long surprising conversations. Who could have guessed that Kevin Orr had read *The Magus*?

Ken gave me a ride home. He told me how the nuns used to crack a pointer across their knuckles when they were to be punished. His mother was born in 1914. Ken is the youngest in his family and they lived downtown. He told me there was a lot of hatred in Québec, how the legion guys and veterans would beat up the French who wouldn't go to war. This is the side of Montréal I do not see, and will never experience as I do not have those kinds of roots here. I realize my view is idealized, blinkered by wishful thinking and rebellion.

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I'm not sure what I'm trying to accomplish, taking another creative writing class at Concordia University. I guess I've decided after writing that novel to enter the Seal First Novel Contest, I actually enjoy writing and meeting other people who are also interested in it. It's also a way of bringing my writing into the world, which is very difficult for me to do. There are times when I sit in the class feeling impatient, almost ashamed for being there. But there are other times when the instructor, Colin Browne, will say something which gives me the flash.

At first I thought he was going to be another Terry Byrnes, but the resemblance is superficial. Colin is more personal and intuitive than Terry's more detached cerebral approach. Colin treats people's stories gently and gives each person the chance to speak. He is very kind and often flustered, rushing breathlessly into the classroom, his hair always looking windswept. He seems anxious to please, although the notes he writes on each story are copious, and he always asks if we understood what he has said. This is in complete contrast to Terry Byrnes's style. Colin also refers to completely different writers, such as Guy Davenport, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortazar, instead of Updike, Bernard Malamud who all seem so old. I find Colin's references so much more exciting.

Colin talks about the "geography of writing" as being different and separate from physical geography, ages, chronology. We did an exercise in free writing, which was to write without constraints to get in touch with our deeper selves, which he believes is the source of the best work. He talked about how many worlds exist with each person at the table, and about airplanes that each of us have. We send up a dozen "official" airplanes, yet there are a hundred more that fly around out of range. I was intrigued and excited by his imagery, which is a million times better than I've recounted here.

He described the short story as being an "attraction," a magnetic pole of line of force that brings together impressions, observations, memories, perceptions, you never noticed or connected before, and it brings them into a relationship, or that wonderful word DH Lawrence uses, "connexion."

After the free-writing exercise some of my classmates made interesting observations. Doug Lumley said he felt some resistance as he was writing. He would be free-writing for a while and then it seemed as if his consciousness took over at some point, not wanting to explore it any deeper and imposed a sort of order on the language. Colin said that the subconscious was actually incredibly ordered with its archetypes. Interesting talk.

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At work I read another story about software manufacturers and publishers who are developing programs that will compose documents. According to this tech writer, I don't really read and respond to the language in a story, I'm actually "extracting meaning from grammar that is creatively ambiguous." Which isn't much different from what a computer program can do. Interesting concept.

Also found an amazing article about fibre optics in *Telephone Engineer and Management* magazine. It reminds me of Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale*, that same brilliance, mystery and wonder. "Some day, as glass fibre replaces the millions of circuit miles of copper wire and transmission is by beams of light, our cities will not only be warmer but street lights will be unnecessary. Of course ordinary glass won't work; it has to be enchanted optical glass, the same material used to make crystal balls, magic mirrors and glass eyes. This is then drawn into a fibre so thin there's only room for a single frequency of light. This is called single mode fibre. Those fibres of a few micrometers in diameter are spliced into a conductor several kilometres long. ...

"Impurities in the glass must be avoided. There are two major problems in producing fibers; sparkles and shadows. Sparkles appear as static in the voice band while shadows cause audio roll-off. The sparkle shadow product must remain below the the astigmatism index or the light goes incoherent.

"If the system is to carry intelligible conversations, the light must be coherent. No one can understand incoherent light. Coherent light ranges in wavelength from black light to white light. In between we have blue, orange, green, brown and slate. Twisted pairs always have a white light mate. ...

"The ruby laser gives out ruby red light; a diamond laser gives pure white and the onyx, of course, gives black light. ...

"Optical-electrical receivers are connected to the far end of the fibre ... They extract the intelligence from the light beam and discard the dumb carrier. If the light is attenuated below the threshold level, it enters the twilight zone where weird things happen; strange voices are often heard (cross-talk) and unusual and frightening sounds emanate from space (carrier group alarms, etc)."

Jan. 19

Went to an astrology lecture at Terre Étoile. When I saw all the people clustered in the entrance I almost fled. I've always dreaded entering or leaving a room when the passage is blocked, no opportunity for a swift clean getaway. I prefer quiet exits; disappearance. But I mustered some self-discipline, entered the bloody room and saw Joe sitting by himself at the back. He intrigues me. His interest in astrology must be very strong to pull him here, solitary and tenacious in his quest. Then I saw Susan. She seemed happy to see me and greeted me warmly. I mentioned how I had almost chickened out. She understood because she often feels the same way; I am like this because of my 12th House. We were both raw today; exposed, ultra-sensitive, vulnerable to any contact with others. We vibrated like two planets, approaching, spinning away from each other.

Paul Ostan Hewit from Toronto spoke for the first half of the afternoon on Jupiter, the negative side to this planet that isn't examined in the books. He is a Sagittarian and the lecture was philosophical and light-hearted with many people asking questions or commenting about configurations or aspects they have in their own charts. Since I have no grand squares, yods, multiple t-squares or even an opposition, I never participate. My chart couldn't be any less interesting in a class or lecture environment.

Susan and I sat together for Hewit's afternoon Pluto lecture. The difference between the Pluto and Jupiter lectures was night and day. Where the Jupiter talk had been informative and a real communication forum, the Pluto talk was serious and I became very aware of the light darkening in the window. The air became sultry, the atmosphere intense and concentrated. Hewit delved into mythology, and said Montréal was always a Plutonic experience for him.

After the lecture, I lingered hoping to say goodbye to Susan. She looked around for me and thought I had left. When she found me, she said, "You were there and all of a sudden you were gone. Twelfth House – she must have vaporized!" We talked and she introduced me to André Dionne, who will be teaching the interpretation class. I glowed when Susan called me her "star pupil." She suggested that maybe we could work together on one of the newsletters; she was tired of having to use letraset and wanted some real creativity for once. I have the feeling she naturally dislikes working in groups and she wouldn't just say something like that to anyone.

Then she invited me for coffee with her and Paul. The president of the ASM (Astrological Society of Montréal) joined us. She hates air ionizers, socialists and Brian Mulroney, which made for a rather strange conversation. Paul Hewit talked mostly about space travel, Heinlein novels, “Raiders of the Lost Ark” and how he only likes action movies. Any time I ever find myself with the “in” group, I always end up feeling like Marcel Proust, thrilled at having been part of it for a while, but also terribly disillusioned. I reiterated my offer to help Susan with newsletter work and we embraced.

Jan. 21

First astrology class with André Dionne. It was held at the heart of a labyrinth, deep in the interior of the YMCA building. I descended down a few red stairs into a cell that smelled of plaster. Joe has returned for level 2. Turns out he was born in Hamilton and spent some time in Collingwood. Gwen and Danielle are also back. Gwen is older than I thought. She was born in 1925 in Cardiff, Wales, and the thing she misses most is the sea. She has a crest of red hair, a hearty laugh and a blithe way of speaking but tonight I saw a more private, reserved side to her. André is small and wispy. I think Susan told me he’s a Cancer. He uses a Cancerian language, talks a great deal about home. He frequently uses images of home to illustrate points. He gives us a lot of information and expresses it intuitively, organically, not as a lecture or cook-book list of principles. My pen works fast to keep up with what he gives us. He went over the planetary types – which is the shape the aspects of your chart make. Bowl type, bundle type, etc. We went over all the students’ charts and he asked what it meant to us.

Mine is a definite bundle pattern and he told me I should take relationship courses. Yep, that makes sense to me. I admit I was a little affronted by his bluntness but he was talking on a theoretical level about a configuration that lacks an opposition. Without the opposition the pattern can be too contained, too self-sufficient. It’s an opposition in a chart which often compels a person to reach out to someone and form a synthesis.

Jan. 22

Did my first reading for Colin's class. Selected "The Aunt Marjorie Chamber," figuring it would be fun to read and is probably the most straightforward thing I've ever written. Some of the comments, especially by men who always seem more literal, were obtuse or surprising. You can never tell how someone is going to interpret your words. To me, this story was completely transparent, yet some people expected a real ghost to appear. Some of the comments were wonderful though. Cathy Gray told me it brought back memories of her own childhood. She had often wanted to do what the kids in the story did but didn't have the imagination or creative ability to do it. She said my story gave her an idea for a story of her own.

Michèle Gauthier's writing sometimes reminds me of Anne Hébert, and sometimes there is a fairy tale quality to it. Some of her sentences are long with unusual syntax which makes her writing graceful, tender, charming. You see ordinary things in a fresh light – light filtered through the lace in the window. It's as if she's created a new language, a graceful, elegant fusion of English and French. She told me "Man Teacher" took her back to her schooldays, and that I could have been in her class or living next door to her when she was growing up.

Colin liked "Aunt Marjorie," said it was an "accomplished story." (I do like to be considered competent!) He said that "Man Teacher" was much more complex, then asked me how long I had been writing. He asked if I had time after class so he could talk to me about the story, and we met in the English office. I was with Sally Qureshi, who was sort of a witness to the day's triumph. As usual, Colin was moving swiftly, in a great flap, his hair swept off his face, reminding me for all the world of Mr Alchuk. Colin's face is always poised between kindness and tension.

He told me "Man Teacher" was a very fine piece of writing. He gave it to Margaret Hollingsworth (Concordia writer-in-residence) to read and she agreed with him. They both think I should start submitting it for publication to some of the literary magazines. He said he enjoyed my story more than most of the pieces in *The Rubicon*. He also suggested I join the senior class as I might not be able to learn too much in his class. He is so completely wrong about that. This class has completely regenerated me.

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Sally Qureshi and Darlene McRae have been chuckling over the stories they are writing for the class. They are submitting them as tests to determine whether or not Colin is gay.

Darlene is intriguing. She is very clear and literal. She is the one who will pick up on all the details in the stories, and she's a math major. She also reminds me a little bit of Ellen Ryan, with a lot being under the surface. (Something I forgot to mention when I recounted my last visit with Kim was a photo of Ellen and Mika at Ellen's Halloween party. Mika was dressed as a gypsy; ear-rings, skirt, dramatic, sophisticated, artistic. Realistic, practical Ellen was dressed as Queen Nefertiti – the look really suited her.)

Sally is a warm friendly person from New Brunswick. I have no idea why she's trying to out Colin as gay, but it seems I can overlook a lot in someone who is kind and friendly to me.

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Leaving work one day, Howard asked me about my novel, wondering when it was being published, "you know, the science-fiction romance western mystery like Henry James written in the style of an impressionist painting." What a memory!

Kevin didn't know about the novel. Later he approached me in his quiet way and asked me what it was about. He understood how difficult it is to make conversation about something like that and said he would be very interested in hearing about it. He certainly seems to know about books. He, Ken, Mary and I have had some good literate talks; everything from *Das Boot* to Laurie Anderson!

Howard is verbose and elitist in his pursuit of culture. He is witty with knowledge of a wide range of subjects, but he can be snobbish in talking about them. He can be extremely belittling in his assumptions that other people do not share his rarefied interests. He doesn't want them to. His interests set him apart from the hoi polloi, a badge of his originality. He always has to be griping about something, but he's happy griping. It's just who he is.

He loves playing the role of office “enfant terrible,” but ever since he removed his moustache he seems to have become more accessible, endearing even. I think he smiles more often and yes, he has a dimple. He and Claire are often on each other’s backs, both stubborn, both inclined to over-react at the merest trifle, yet Claire is Howard’s staunch defender when he is absent and refers to him as “our Howard.” Although our jobs don’t overlap, he has come to my rescue a few times with information, or a flash of inspiration.

Feb. 1

I long for spring, for this relentless darkness to ease up. I so want to see light in the evenings again. Going to astrology class Monday nights is like walking into a cave of artificial light and everyone looks weary and transient. Discussion about Saturn tonight. Saturn forms the defense or shield around the inner core of the person. Without delving into Saturn it may be impossible to penetrate far enough past the protective shield to speak with the real person. Where Saturn is in the chart is where you feel limited, restricted or you function in an inferior way. When there is a square, Saturn often becomes projected onto others. Trines or sextiles mean the shadow is better integrated into the personality. Danielle has Saturn in the 7th house, which means she might be inclined to project the shadow aspects on a partner and deny they exist within herself.

André asked me if I had had a lot of responsibility when I was younger. Yes and no. I didn’t have to go to work at an early age or care for ailing family members. but I did have to learn things for myself and create my own life. No one taught me how to do anything, so the tiniest things that come naturally to everyone else were big events and lessons for me.

I can still remember the first time calling Da Giovanni for my first real hair cut. It was actually scary walking down Codrington to that first appointment with a real hair dresser. So yes, I think I had to be self-sufficient very early on. André talked about my planets and Ascendant in Scorpio and Pluto at the Midheaven and said he thought my field would be biochemistry. I am very intrigued by that – and terribly grateful he didn’t say I should be a cop.

We were divided up to do an exercise in chart interpretation. André and I ended up with each other. The first thing I did was draw the chart out. I need to feel the lines appear on the page; the lines, patterns, conjunctions, squares, trines, sextiles. I can't work with only a computer print-out of data. A chart doesn't live for me then. I discovered his chart looks a lot like mine; the same bundle pattern with much the same emphasis, water and fire. His moon tightly conjunct Saturn is much like my Moon in Capricorn. At ten o'clock we filed out of the room, led by André in his little black coat, looking so neat, precise and self-contained.

Feb. 4-8

Getting to know John Eckerlin better. He has an affinity with Claire and the two of them often seem like a little cell of revolutionaries, talking in low, dire voices, mostly disaffected gossip about Bob and all the details about everyone associated with the company. I know now that when John comes in from the back, sits in the chair by Claire's desk we're in for some gossip and grievances. I have discovered that everyone in the company except Bob and Mary are fixed signs. We form a Grand Cross, and we're almost all at the 28th or 29th of the month. I can see it in the way the office functions – or doesn't. It takes a long time to get anything done. And I more or less drift through the days, coming up with my own work. Kevin isn't very accessible when Howard is around. He tends to stay in his office, when he is not driving Mary crazy by taking the panels off the walls and tinkering with the telephone wires. He goes for lunch exclusively with Howard and H tends to monopolize his time.

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Ken has a new job!! He is jubilant, having longed for this since I started here. He told me about the struggling days, how he had once wanted to be a cop, and how demoralized he was here at Broadcast Holdings. Now he feels he is on his way to something worthwhile – a real computer-aided drafting position at CAE Electronics.

CAD is a growing new field and a whole new start, especially with a new baby on the way. He became emotional, talking about how his dream in life was to have a house, a garden for his wife, Isabelle, and a backyard for the baby to grow up in. I am really going to miss him, his jokes, our discussions, his little-brother teasing. I'm losing my buddy, the first one besides Mary or Claire, to sit down and talk with me.

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Fred and I went to Margaret Hollingsworth's reading at Sir George Williams campus. She is small and exuberant, really seemed to enjoy acting out her characters, changing accents and intonations. Colin burst in, dressed in a straight black coat, streaming red scarf, cocked beret, looking kind, windswept and breathless as usual. After the reading I joined Cathy Gray, Michèle Gauthier, Steven Frank, David Gosselin and Ira Roth at the front. Mary Fowke also joined us. She is intriguing; sensitive, gentle. She moved to Montréal from Nova Scotia, one of these people who suddenly and mysteriously appear. Cathy's warmth and enthusiasm kept us all together and we went upstairs to the faculty club, which was as dark, plush and stuffy as we expected. We clustered and talked about Europe. Ira held court. She must be in her mid-forties but shines when she tells stories. Everyone defers to her, especially young men like David and Marc Tessier.

Snow was falling outside and it was a beautiful delicate view of the city. Colin disappeared for a while, abruptly and cryptically, then returned with Margaret H. He brought her over to us and we plagued her with questions until she looked and sounded weary and bored. Colin never patronizes us, treats us unfailingly as if we are his colleagues. He described Vancouver and how much smaller it is than Montréal.

It seemed much later than it really was when an old man shambled in. He was apparently drunk, wandering around in circles. At one point he looked as if he might join us. Thankfully, he sank into a chair and dozed off. Colin was smiling, watching me watching this character.

Michèle is the charming demure one in school who would commit minor infractions, such as talk behind the teacher's back, then immediately look bright-eyed and attentive. She gets a mischievous expression on her face and she quietly, subversively encourages the bolder ones to speak up or rebel. She fascinates me. Another odd guy entered the room. This one pulled up a chair and joined us. Every time Cathy Gray opened her mouth to speak he would leap in and say, "That's *interesting*." Michèle, unable to repress her laughter any more, excused herself and ran to the bathroom.

It wasn't surprising to hear the guy ask Cathy to go somewhere with him afterwards, but she told him she was with Colin. "Thanks a lot!" said Colin, when we were clustered in the elevator. I noticed the guy was waiting at the entrance for Cathy, but she was escorted by Michèle and David Gosselin, so I didn't worry. "I guess that's all part of going away to school in a city, learning how to avoid characters like that," Colin said in his whimsical way. Well, actually it's part of being a woman, and you certainly don't have to live in a city. "You get to know every nook, cranny and hiding place in a city that way," I said.

Fred was delighted that Colin and Margaret accepted his offer for a ride. Ira invited herself along, but her company was enjoyable. She kept up the conversation talking about people she met on her travels. Margaret was tired but pleased with her reading and the response to it. Colin darted about, wiping Fred's window off with his hand, trying to be helpful, unable to keep still. Dropped everyone off in NDG. Colin and Margaret seem to be staying only a few streets away from us. Fred and I joked about having Canadian celebrities in the car; they had to be authentic Canadian celebrities because no one will have heard of them.

Feb. 15

Dinner at Geoberti's to celebrate (or mourn) Ken's last day. Unfortunately, Bob came too. I think the reason why we all insult him so much is because he is a disillusioning man. You don't see how dreadful he is at first meeting. He puts on a show in interviews; new dynamic company, a real entrepreneur who sees his employees as family. But we've all come to realize we are no more important to Jeffcott than lamp posts.

My moment of truth came when he wouldn't even listen to me about the correct spelling of a word – after all that BS about me helping to write and edit reports! I think it's the expectations and high hopes we all carried into the company which has caused all the disaffection. We all got the sales pitch and ended up in a cul-de-sac. I don't think I have ever heard a boss mocked like this. When Mary Good talks about filling his office full of spiders as soon as he leaves for vacation, you know something is wrong.

Bob sat beside Mary, near Claire, myself and Ken. He was an absolute boor, hollering at the waitress, declaring his wine was terrible. He belittled something John said. A horrible combination of obnoxiousness and insecurity. At one point someone in the corner, probably Howard, called Bob "Mr Potato-Head." Ken and I started to laugh. And so, Ken left on this ridiculous note.

Feb. 18

Read "The Polar Bear Express" aloud. I probably shouldn't have led with my best work. With this story I wanted to capture the intensity and immediacy of a moment, yet somehow make it clear that a moment like this can also have huge repercussions that extend far beyond the actual event. I wanted to take on the rhythm and speed of a fair. Colin thought it was too much a sketch; there wasn't enough to make a complete story. He also thought there was a telegraphic quality to the writing. I lingered behind for a while to see if he had any suggestions as to how to build more of a story while keeping the immediacy, the tempo and rhythm I wanted. He thought I needed more of a context, or a lead-into the feeling. He then said that when he reread it, he found the piece itself didn't mean anything to him, or it wouldn't have if he hadn't already been acquainted with the character of Crissy.

I mulled that over, then realized that the critiques I had received from the class all had to do with Crissy herself, rather than the structure or context of the story itself. Colin mentioned a prim or prissy stage young girls seem to go through, and suggested that could be the context or build-up to the ride. That way I could explore why the release that is taking place on the fairground ride would be necessary for the character. I started thinking of a mounting-releasing kind of rhythm and left class quite abruptly, barely remembering to thank him for these new ideas.

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Some of the people in the class intrigue me. Their writing, or the way they talk about their writing is so often different from their classroom personalities. Colin told Cathy Gray that her stories are fraught with situations and emotions that are never quite developed. She told him she was worried about developing them too much, but he said he thought she was *afraid* to develop them as they should be.

Sally Qureshi's writing is both shallow and strange. So shallow it becomes strange and fascinating. She writes about day-to-day events but adds no meaning or any reason for these stories to have been written. Reading them is like overhearing a really tedious conversation on transit. Yet she told me, very emotionally, that being a writer, or being on a magazine, was the dream of her life. She received a bad critique from Colin on her last story and she was very upset, saying she didn't know what she would do if he didn't pass her in the course, or give her permission to go on. This class is the prerequisite for the others she needs in her program. There seems to be such a huge gap between this dream and her writing ability. I wonder why she wants to be a writer so badly. I do appreciate her as a reader, her critiques are often insightful. Maybe she would do well as a reviewer. Magazine writing might be up her alley as well.

David (DM) Gosselin writes stream-of-consciousness stories, made up of images strung together. His writing often contains some dark subconscious passages. Yet his attitude in class and the way he projects himself is flippant. He also dismisses his own work in class saying, “I wasn’t trying to write a story anyway.” I do wish these classes weren’t so completely focused on story-writing. It almost seems like some kind of formula. Maybe David isn’t writing stories, but why should he? The writing is powerful on its own terms. This shaping everything into a short story format, an easily consumed narrative, can be quite restrictive to both writer and reader.

Marc Tessier is needy. He slouched in on the first day with his arms folded across his chest, and spoke defensively. Colin did not turn his back on him, rather drew him out to the point where he was involved in the conversation and could even laugh at himself. Marc still walks an edge between defensiveness and vulnerability. Sometimes he sits beside Colin and speaks only to him. One day, Colin talked about integrating dreams into writing and we did a free-writing exercise. Marc told the class about a dream he had about running a race with his father. They were both attached, as if they were Siamese twins, and they were running into the sun. Colin said this was a major theme in Marc’s life, and then he marvelled at how deep we all go with our own personal mythologies, themes, lifetime motifs.

This writing course and the astrology class nourish each other. At work I read something about nodes in telecommunications and how they are terminals or synthesis points for cross-currents of energies. Nodes in an astrological chart seem to function much the same way. The aspect lines in a chart do seem to resemble lines of telecommunication with different colours, vibrations, frequencies. These three nodes in my life are joined and seem to pull or divine toward something.

Stephen Schettini is a mature student, probably in his mid-forties. He is a critical, questioning, cultivated man in his breeches and knee-high boots, looking exactly how I always pictured Renny Whiteoak from the Whiteoaks of Jalna series. He writes well, but with so much structure the characters and the language he uses can seem calcified. Every so often the tempo will change, as if there is something underneath that wants out.

He works very hard – one of his stories has been revised fifteen times! Stephen was intrigued by Marc's dream and asked him for his birth data. Marc reacted with pleasure and wariness. He said he was a Sagittarius with a Pisces Ascendant. As it turns out, Stephen does charts and has been interested in astrology for a long time. Of course, there is also the fact that Marc knew his ascendant.

Feb. 18

Arrived early at astrology class. Joe was already there. He was surprisingly forthcoming when he saw me, smiling and beckoning me over to his table. Turns out our paths really have crossed. He's originally from Burlington and spent four years working as a draftsman at the Collingwood shipyards, so he knew all about Barrie and the Simcoe County area. We laughed, reminisced and joked about the Queen's Hotel, the Brookdale, Barrie Burger, Roberto's Pizzeria, all names that make me cringe. We were having so much fun I didn't notice André slip into the seat across from me.

We spent the class reading the charts of our designated classmates. André went first. He had my chart and did an alarmingly thorough reading. He described a much earthier side to me than either Susan or Stephen the astrologer (the one Jim went to and induced me to consult as well). André totally overlooked Neptune, the Twelfth House and my Uranus squares. A lot of people overlook Uranus in my chart even though it immediately aspects my Sun and Mercury. When I looked at my chart and told Jim that Stephen had missed an aspect, Jim shrugged it off and said Stephen probably thought it "was of no consequence." Stephen was good at his job and was truly embarrassed when I told him about it. He re-drew the chart. It was Jim who decided Uranus was of no consequence. That aspect didn't fit into his idealized picture of me, his fantasies of love which had nothing to do with me as a real person. Those Uranus squares made all the sense in the world to me. Sometimes I get angry when I think about Jim and wonder why I put up with him for so long. Susan is the one person who seems to tune into my Uranus and I'm relieved to think one person recognizes these aspects of me.

André also ignored Uranus and talked about my strong Saturn and Pluto. He said I was a real survivor, one who works well under stress and in a crisis. I would be resourceful and sustaining. I would make a great deal of discovery through observation. He said I'm self-sufficient, a great source of support to someone in need. I attract and absorb energy, taking it all in, and I have a need to get involved in something wholeheartedly. He recommended I read Rousseau - *Les reveries du promeneur solitaire*. I love the title!

After class I started thinking about Saturn, and how all my best friends at Elrond have strong Saturn aspects; squares, conjunctions. Val has a very tight Moon-Saturn conjunction in Sagittarius. (Also very similar to my Moon in Capricorn.) She is very fiery but this placement makes her feel she lacks fire in some way. This explains why she never sees how she is actually roasting others. Sharon's sun is in the 10th house, squared Saturn – same as Jim's. Somehow we all ended up in Elrond, and deeply involved with each other. All of us wounded by the past, deprived, misunderstood. We all come from weird backgrounds and had unhappy or fraught childhoods. There is a sense that life isn't easy. "The absurd," says Marsha. "Oh well, yet another betrayal. When will I ever be happy," says Val. "How predictable," says Sharon.

**

Road trip to Vermont. Sunny all the way through Québec to the border. A smoky day, purplish blush of trees. Everything is "ish" today. Rolling white hills, prim white clapboard houses; so symmetrical with precisely placed pillars, cornices, Greek revival. Yet there are also houses sinking into the ground, peeling paint revealing rotten wood. A village huddles on a curve at the edge of the road near Mount Mansfield. It looks so isolated, especially compared to Burlington, a college town full of healthy-looking people in sweaters, walking large dogs, carrying babies in Snuglis. Essex Discount Drinks and Redemption Centre. A sea of snow, more purplish mountains, junctions, intersections, roadhouses, near-villages. Dimming light, hard to know if we were approaching the mountains or driving away from them. Health centres, gun shops and the Howard Bank. Liquor store with huge Uncle Sam cut-out.

**

Drive along boulevard Gouin, along the north shore. Everything was still as a theatre set. Stickle-backed snow packed around the houses. Things seemed strange to me. Bungalows with the most complex facades, archways, pillars, stone and plaster lions, fake wood and stone, fake turrets. All of these houses seemed strange in some ways, a caricature. They gave me a sense of unease. Space aliens could have designed them, imitating the prevailing styles and taste and just not getting it right. A brick turret attached between two square clapboard buildings, a window shaped like a porthole. A bar appeared in the window as if I had just dreamed it up. It seemed to exist in the middle of nowhere on a deserted side street. Big red Art Deco lettering that said RIO. It belonged in another time, another place, maybe 1940s New York. Maybe it came from the Twilight Zone; the whole drive felt like I had entered the Twilight Zone.

Feb. 25

Drew André's chart at work. I don't have the impression anyone at BHCL has much work to do right now. Oh well, time to think about all the parallels between the language of telecommunications and the language of astrology – the worlds that can be created by those languages. In telecommunications, nodes are sensitive points, a synthesis of energies. In turn, astrological charts look like configuration diagrams, bus, dual-bus, star structures, the firm delicate tight lines of energy, flowing or tense, drawn between two points.

The three threads to my life right now: work, writing, astrology. Drawn into a fibre so thin it blends into a single frequency of light, ranging in wavelength from black light and blue, orange, green, brown and slate in between. If light is attenuated below the threshold level, it enters the twilight zone where strange voices can be heard, cross-talk, unusual and frightening sounds, sounds emanating from space immune to radio frequency. Extremely difficult to extract or insert data via tapping. This makes me think of my own Mercury, conjunct Neptune, square Uranus in the 12th House below the surface.

**

Another drive along the North Shore, leaving the island this time. Melting ice, chill greys and whites. On a day like this any colour becomes intense. Balcony of red and salmon pink, royal blue roofs, eaves, shutters, balconies. Mount Royal half-covered in cloud. Driving down Rachel, I could almost imagine being in an western mountain town. Turned down an alley and the western feeling vanished. Jumble of tenements, porches covered in plastic, misfit pieces of wood and cardboard. Charming stores with shutters, lovely boutiques, new cobblestones. Humanist party headquarters in revolutionary orange. The street narrows until it is no wider than an alleyway, and I am surprised by a large mural; a rainbow on a rich blue background.

Fred and I continue tunnelling along and see blue pentagrams painted on metallic walls, astrological symbols, a delicate line drawing of a woman's face. Up St-Laurent past the fish stores, charred buildings, boarded-up windows, singed brick. Rain. Everything illuminated. Hole-in-the-wall café with a mural of a cup of coffee attached to red and yellow balloons, rising into the deep blue yonder.

**

Susan Kelly called. This little hesitant voice saying, "Hello, this is Susan Kelly." We are both tentative with each other, sensitive to the point where the smallest encounter causes vibrations. Pauses in the conversation are fraught. I sense a kindred spirit though; we really connect. She's quitting her job at Pratt and Whitney and is taking a month off to do writing and astrology. I got to tell her all kinds of things no one else I know would be interested in. I told her about the fixed signs in my office. We ranted about Capricorns – neither of us get along with them. We also complained about Aquarians, how they think they are intellectually superior to others and that no one else could possibly share their "esoteric" interests.

I told her about André's reading and she said, "Oh how embarrassing – with everyone else there," understanding immediately how I felt. She also found it curious that he hadn't mentioned Neptune, Uranus or the 12th House. She laughed when I said his reading had been so earthy I felt I should have been planted. She said André was pretty sensitive and I was very sensitive, so he may have accentuated the earth tones on purpose to show where I have resources and strength. She suggested we get together for coffee. I hope it happens.

Feb. 25

My turn to skewer André this week. I was quite nervous about it, but after I plunged into it, I became aware of how straight he was sitting, how vulnerable he looked – straight and neat and compact. He looked as nervous as I felt. It is an entirely different thing to having someone sitting in front of you than it is to sit on the living room floor drawing lines on a chart. People talk about intuition and ask questions about its role in chart interpretation. Maybe some of the intuition comes from finding out how to express something face-to-face. As in writing, you have to determine the voice or language to use, that will best bring out the message. Charts are thematic – and they are redundant. Many aspects, planetary positions, houses are variations on a theme.

I found André's chart similar to mine in some ways. My moon is in Capricorn squared Mars and Jupiter in Libra. His moon is tightly conjunct Saturn. His Sun is squared Neptune, mine is conjunct. His sun is conjunct Uranus, mine is squared Uranus. He encouraged me as I read the chart, agreeing with most of the points I was making. At one point I talked about the structure of his Moon-Saturn conjunction. He talked with me as if we were just two people involved in a real consultation. He said it was funny but he always felt that no matter how much he was surrounded by something dangerous or overwhelming he had that structure to fall back on, or pull him out. That was the gift of the Earth aspects, Saturn in particular. After I finished he said it was good and I had covered everything.

At break he mentioned he was a macrobiotic vegetarian. Robert Philion teased him about smoking. Then André told us he had been on drugs for 12 years and the vegetarianism was something that came out of that, a natural evolution that worked for him.

Feb. 26

Talked with Colin about “New Year’s Eve.” The comments on the story were uncharacteristically sparse and ambivalent. He said the voice didn’t ring as true for him as it had in “Aunt Marjorie,” but he didn’t know why – hence the sparseness of his comments. I realized while looking the story over with him, how much of a transition piece is is, how Carla wavered between adult and child, her language and feelings constantly shifting. I told Colin how much I wanted to create a transitional language to suit this shifting stage of her life. I wanted to create immediacy, the scene appearing before the reader like images in a photograph. He thought this was a great goal, one that concerned the 20th century. He recommended I read Gertrude Stein, that she had had the same concerns. I am so glad I didn’t let Colin talk me out of continuing his class. I am learning so much from him.

**

Called the Wheeze. It was wonderful hearing her warm chipper “Hi Bat!” She and John went on their trip to London and they both loved it. The people were warm, the pubs comfortable and homey. She met fascinating characters wherever she went. It was a let-down being back in Kingston and she is doing things to keep interested; cooking classes, tai chi. She wants to open a roadside stall that serves foods like cheese blintzes, figuring it would fit in with all the chip wagons that proliferate throughout Kingston in the summer. As usual we talked about Sharon, both concerned over her isolation in Toronto.

We’ve always cast Sharon in too much of a role as our authority figure, almost a parental figure from which we rebel. She is where we go to touch ground, to hear about reality, our limitations. We’ve both used her as a saturnine kind of figure that imposes discipline or disapproval on our wilder schemes. Much more so when we all lived in Elrond. It worked both ways though. We were Sharon’s escape hatches, the people she lived through vicariously, the ones who acted out her freedom, rebellion, foolishness.

Even now Marsha assumes Sharon isn't going to approve of something and seems to need the feeling that Sharon is going to react this way – so Marsha perpetually plays the part of “enfant terrible.” As for me, I still feel that need for Sharon's admiration, her acceptance of the self I wanted to be. I still seem to need someone who thinks I'm popular, unpredictable and attractive to other people.

March 7

Lila McKiel read her long story in class, an excellent piece of writing full of fine detail and skillfully employed flashbacks. After her reading, I was very nervous about following her with “A Tom Waits Sort of Day.” The response from the class was overwhelming. No one had anything negative to say about it. Lila said she might as well have not bothered reading today. Sally said it was beautiful. But the most rewarding comments came from Marc Le May of all people. He said the story was great, there was so much in it and it was so humorous. Praise from on high!

This story was written very quickly, almost one sitting. It flowed. It is so organic, so much a unit I would find it hard to examine the sentences individually. Colin said he liked it but I think he'll find a lot of little flaws not obvious in a reading. This is one story in which the sum of its parts is less than the whole.

**

Irritating-absurd day at work. Bob playing power games with Mary, John pouring his heart out to Claire. Kevin harried, Howard hurried. Meanwhile I sat at my desk as Claire muttered dire threats against Bob. Found an amusing article about work and Kevin asked to see it. I said I thought it was funny but maybe I don't really have a sense of humour. “Oh you must,” said Kevin. “You consented to work here.”

Fred came to pick me up. Howard saw the car and announced that “the Flycatcher” was here. Claire demanded to know why he would call Fred that name. “I have my own particular reasons for it,” said Howard. “You're becoming more and more like Bob every day,” she snapped. I explained to her that Howard called Fred “the Flycatcher” because his car has a crash bar on the front of it for off-roading.

**

Went to an astrology lecture at Terre Étoile. Donna Van Toen, who is based in Toronto, spoke on aspects to the moon's nodes. Most of what she said was interesting, down-to-earth, straight-up psychology. The north nodes show where you must go, what you must use in order to grow. The south nodes indicate what is comfortable, familiar, what has been conditioned and all too easy to lapse back into. When there are a lot of aspects to the north nodes, it indicates someone who is always conscious of the need for growth. It becomes an urgency. She asked if anyone had Uranus square their north nodes. I have an exact square between the two. Apparently that indicates a "super-Uranian" kind of person.

It might account for my impatience when change seems to take such a long time to occur. Maybe also why I felt so driven to get out of Barrie, as if I was trying to escape from a peat bog. I also have Pluto as a sextile to my north nodes. Pluto is a transforming energy, so perhaps some form of counselling or psychology could help balance Scorpio's understanding of human nature with Taurus's awareness of resources and constructive action. Anyway, the north nodes in my chart seem highly charged.

Met up with Susan. She mentioned feeling two ways about quitting Pratt and Whitney. The main feeling was one of relief, that she had been sprung from a prison. She also finds she misses the family aspect of it. She lives alone in Montréal, her family is in California and her co-workers were the only ones she saw on a daily basis.

March 12

Rainy day, yet cozy in the office. I thought about what Susan said about co-workers and family. Mary and Claire complimented me on my outfit and told me how much they like all my clothes, that they are cute, unique and suit me. Mary is a lovely person. Gentle yet with a mischievous sense of humour and enough integrity to stand up for herself against Bob's bombast. She is open-minded, aware of books and current events and always has interesting stories about her childhood. She is British, lived in South Africa, the youngest in her family. She spent too much time alone with her mother and feels she is too sheltered. Men are protective toward her (except Jeffcott who alternates between bullying and whining at her).

She is stylish and justifiably proud of her figure. Her interest in health and nutrition comes out all the time in conversation. She is concerned about preservatives and doesn't believe in seeing doctors or taking drugs. She has a strong interest in holistic forms of medicines and often describes various practices she has heard about from the Chinese or Koreans. It was amusing to hear Mary trying to convince Claire that her eczema was psychosomatic.

Needless to say Claire was not convinced. She is black and white, up and down, but always resilient. She can be extremely reactionary, which often makes me impatient, yet when I think of her background she is actually quite extraordinary. Contact with a different people has probably made her more open and sympathetic than she might otherwise be. I appreciate her kinetic energy, her efforts, her deep sympathy for the underdog. I could really see her setting up or lobbying for a union.

Kevin seems beleaguered these days. There is frustration in his quiet voice. I feel we are allies. I think Howard is an ally too, only on a more detached level. Both he and Kevin are both arguing that I need a computer terminal at my desk to start putting my projects on-line – which is one of the things I thought I was hired to do!

**

Colin read one of his stories out to the class. "The Cougar." it was wonderful. Legendary, sensuous, full of sounds. Every word chosen with precision, creating sounds, vibrations. Later, Marc Lemay told me he kept my "Tom Waits" story on his kitchen table to reread parts of it. He told me he thought it was exquisite.

Sally Qureshi is puzzling. She smokes when she feels stressed-out and her husband has no idea she has ever smoked. Her husband accused her of having an affair and she said she laughed her head off at him. In all her stories there is a strange, woozy blurring of the sexes, an ambiguity so strong it is difficult to tell who is male and who is female. Yet she is obsessed with pinning down Colin's sexual orientation. She is quite a paradox.

March 22-23

Boot arrived at 6:30 this morning. Went to Old Montréal, which I think she enjoys but it's hard to know with her. Her passivity drives me crazy. I receive no feedback, no suggestions as to what she might like to do. As for conversation, I can't talk about the most rudimentary ideas without seeing her eyes go blank. Although she does have feelings for animals, at least in theory, she doesn't seem to have any empathy for other people. Maybe I'm completely wrong. Maybe she just doesn't (or can't) communicate any of these things. She's always been a bit of a cipher to me. She's going into the hospital for tonsillitis and then again later for a sinus operation. She described these things to me in excruciating detail.

Wheeze came in around 7. She got a ride through the ride-board at Queen's and had to endure a pair of preppies – a Westmount prep in Vic Hall attire and a Beaconsfield prep decked out in leather. They referred to their stone mansions as “little shacks.” Marsha got out on the wrong end of Côte-St-Antoine, the Westmount end. The Westmount prep promptly plied her with questions about her wealthy friends. She ended up walking up the mountain and of course, this being Westmount, there were no phone booths. Finally she was able to call Fred and he picked her up. She loped in, wearing the same coat as me. Our coats even had the same crumpled sleeve hung up on the rack. Wheeze was able to draw the Boot out, as I had hoped. Boot doesn't like my friends and will sullenly avoid them. Wheezel said she was crazy about our apartment, how large it is, almost the size of a London flat.

Went to Romano's for pizza, then drove into town where we looked for a bar that was not standing room only. Finally ended up in a strange little bar (la Chaconne) just off St-Denis. The place was deserted when we walked in, a classical music venue with an empty stage area, a spotlight and microphones surrounding a grand piano. A soft living light created purple and blue shadows, like auras, around the objects. This twilight could have brought its own life into the room, thought in life, thought-forms. Portraits on the wall, flowered wall paper, benches, a black and white portrait of Arthur Rimbaud.

The waitress glided out of the light to take our orders. Music started to play and I could see the piano player who has been living in this bar since the 1920s. *Le fantôme de l'orgue*, *le fantôme de la bar Chaconne*. The acoustics of that light, colours that appeared as if from a tuning fork. I was spellbound.

Boot slept in the yellow room and Wheeze on the foam pad in the living room. a delightful topsy-turvy of showers, breakfasts, people roaming around wild-haired and pyjama-clad. We wandered down Prince-Arthur, poked into caverns of clothing too expensive for us, stopped in a the *Croissant de lune*. Dinner at home. Fred made lasagna. He and Wheeze got into a discussion of wills and funerals. Boot and I retired to the bathroom and mostly talked about her chances of getting into the Seneca vet tech program. She was sitting on the edge of the bathtub, me on the toilet. These are the times I like her best, when we're informal and physically close.

Back in the living room Boot fell asleep on the couch and the three of us talked. Wheeze told us about the breakthrough she had made with her parents at Christmas. She got her sister and brothers together and arranged to sponsor a foster child on behalf of their parents. The parents were deeply touched and wanted to know who initiated it. When they found out it was Marsha they welcomed her back in the family, figuring this was a truly Christian thing to do, and now they felt free to accept John. I'm pretty sure I've heard this story before, or a close variation of it. Seems to happen every Christmas. But it just shows how important Marsha's family is to her. She likes to see herself as a black sheep and a rebel but I don't think she could ever cut them off emotionally.

March 25

Went early to astrology class to look over my notes. I can feel the air becoming lighter, a subtle release. I have noticed how our group (as do other groups of people with only one thing in common) will stand in a circle, spaced apart and talk for awhile, everyone eager to please, contributing one or two sanitized anecdotes. The conversation will die after a while. Everyone will shift and sway, they start looking away from each other, at bulletin boards, shoes, the floor.

Then André appears, as if he has walked through the wall. Sometimes he seems so disciplined and controlled it is hard to relate to his Cancer Sun. The Moon-Saturn conjunction comes through loud and clear. His face looks gaunt, expressionless until he laughs. Then he crinkles his nose and with his light amber eyes, looks like a cat – a Leo.

He said Gwen and I had done very well in our interpretation exercises. I had done well with his chart and Gwen had had fun tackling Joe. André said that even after twelve years there were still aspects of astrology he didn't understand. I asked, "What do you have trouble with?" He said he had trouble with the water signs and the 12th house, knowing how they manifest in a person's life. One of our classmates, Antoinette, has an aspect in his 12th house. He can't relate it to her at all and he doesn't feel she would be open to talk about it. He is much more thorough with Saturn, the earth signs and the angular planets. That certainly explains his very earthy reading of my chart. He mentioned my planets in the 12th house and we joked about how I never particularly enjoyed thinking about prisons, mental hospitals etc etc.

Gwen and I were the only two who had showed up to take the exam. Another class had taken over our usual room and the three of us ended up in a room sized for twenty people. André had constructed a thorough, rigorous exam made up of essay questions, and it took the full two hours. He should have been a teacher or professor. Fred went to an I Ching lecture at Terre Étoile. He finished early and came to the Y to wait for me. He found the three of us in our large exam room and enjoyed our responses to the question of how each of the signs would react to the sinking of the Titanic. Fred and André talked about the I Ching. It turned out to be an interesting night and I got to know André a lot better.

March 29

Bob Jeffcott has twin sons who are clones of him; same suits, beards, arrogance. Mary and Claire have told me frightful tales about the Jeffcott household, how Bob has interfered in the lives of his children to the extent of breaking up their relationships and marriages. The boys themselves seem spineless.

Bella, Bob's Romanian trophy wife, then entered the office and called Kevin "Clyde." I looked at him. "Clyde?" "Yes, Clyde," Kevin replied ruefully. Turned out that Bella has been trying to fix him up with a girl named Connie. He called her Bonnie and Bella now calls him Clyde. I asked Kevin if this occurred before or after he was fixed up with Claire's niece. "About the same time," he said in a truly beleaguered tone. After Bella left, he wandered back over to my desk and said he couldn't think of anything more uncomfortable than being fixed up – or being called "Clyde" for that matter. "I'd sooner walk a tightrope."

Meanwhile, Bob has practically been salivating over his new hire, a hot-shot marketing/sales rep to promote the Omninet contract. Jeffcott has promised him the moon and says he will "wake all the rest of us up." As soon as Bob and Bella left the building, "all the rest of us" had a great time speculating as to how Joe was going to fit in. As Kevin said, "He sure is cut from a different cloth than the rest of us." And John sighed, already martyred.

As BHCL turns. Episode 1: I am furious because Bob lied about me to new marketing hotshot, Joe. He demanded to know what was wrong with the librarian, and said he asked three times for information and didn't receive it. This never happened. It was Kevin who told me this story.

Episode 2: Claire and Mary griped about Howard's behaviour to Bella. Bella told Howard what they had said when he went to get his hair cut at her salon downstairs. My workplace experience is not vast, but this seems ridiculously incestuous.

Episode 3: Kevin ended up stuck with Bob for lunch and out of the blue, Bob asked Kevin (of all people) why Bella has been so cold and frigid to him lately. Kevin turned deep red and hummed and hawed. This story came via John, who is a great gossip and has the best stories. "Well," said Mary, "Bella's always had a roving eye. She told me once that she likes young men!" Stay tuned ...

**

Read “Fibre Optics” to the class and pretty much received the reaction I was expecting. Blank from most of the class, admiration for the attempt by Colin and Stephen Schettini. Colin said he as glad to see I was attempting this kind of work and Stephen said writing it showed a lot of courage. Doug Lumley was very understanding and supportive. I also received a surprisingly nice critique from Terry Garwood. A bond has formed between us. He’s an older man, very traditional in his thinking, writing and his view of women, but we talked one day and he said he was relying on us in the class to show him how young people, particularly young women think. He grew up as an only child and although he’s married, his wife is of the same generation. I’ve been supportive of his work in my critiques because the others can get rather rough in the workshops. Some of his comments on my work have been funny. He says he sees a lot of Crissy in me.

Speaking of Crissy, Ira and Mary Fowke went to a reading last week and they both said my Crissy stories were much better, much truer to a child’s world. My classmates ask me about Crissy, if I have more Crissy-stories. Cathy Gray said she saw an afterschool special and thought of Crissy. Sally is already making Crissy into a series of children’s stories. I would really like to do other types of work. Colin gave me some poems by Diane Ward and suggested they might give me a different way of looking for a form for the story. I don’t want to write Crissy stories forever especially when there are so many things that interest me so much more. But I need to find the right form.

Went to Harvey’s with Sally. More and more curious about her marriage. She’s been married for a year and a half, living in Longueuil since August. He is Indian or Pakistani, hence the name “Qureshi.” This husband is an engineer at Pratt & Whitney (one of Susan Kelly’s obnoxious engineers!) He loathes literary readings and when she talks him into going, he falls asleep or reads the newspaper. When she goes out with his department, they spend most of the time topping each other with stylish clothes and impressive degrees. How did these two people ever meet? Sally’s eyes are soft and deep, vulnerable without her glasses. She kept thanking me for coming out with her because she has a couple of hours until her next class and “always feels lost.” She talks quickly, unfocused, silently beseeching, needing approval. She seems very Piscean or Neptunian.

**

Got *Wizards* back from the Seal first novel contest. No surprise. The manuscript was dog-eared and mangled, though, so it looked as if someone had actually gone through it. I tore the letter from Seal trying to pry it out of the ms. It seemed to have a positive tone so I pieced it back together and received a very pleasant surprise.

“Dear Mr Battler (!)

Re: Wizards

I regret to inform you that your novel has now been eliminated from the Seal First Novel Competition.

On the positive side, however, you should know that your manuscript was one of very few to be held this long in the judging process. It was considered to be a good prospect for our short list. Only 5% of the mss received made it to this stage.

On behalf of Seal Books, McClelland & Stewart, and Bantam Canada I would like to thank you for your submission to the Contest. Clearly some of our readers found you to be a promising writer, should you undertake further work or revisions of this manuscript, we would also be happy to read anything else that you might write in novel form. With all good wishes for the future.

Sincerely,

Janet Turnbull

Vice-President and Publisher”

Well, money and publication would have been nice, but this letter was way better than I expected!

March 29

Colin’s reading. The reading was held in an insultingly awful little room, but Colin made it as intimate as possible by turning off the overhead fluorescents and using a night light. Sally and her husband were there. He seemed very possessive but they had a better rapport together than I expected. Something must have drawn them together.

Taut atmosphere in the room. Colin not necessarily nervous but high strung, speaking very precisely. Seemed to be two camps at the reading; serious poetry students, frowning as if into crystal balls and students supporting Colin. Cathy, David and Michèle stormed in late. The look on Gary Geddes's face could have turned them into pillars of salt. The reading was terrific. One of the poems was exquisite, a completely unexpected yearning quality, which almost made me cry. Others were more typically intellectual, a sonic combination of words and sounds. Stanzas with a tight snap. He can strike words with a tuning fork. Lila said later the poetry sounded just like he does in class; language, voice, all the things he talks about.

Trooped to the faculty club again, the same people arranged in the same positions. Good talk with Mary Fowke. She's leaving Montréal to go travelling, and maybe returning to Nova Scotia. She told me she really liked "Fibre Optics," that it was rich. Ira, too, said she re-read my story and thought it was "extremely talented, ambitious and rich." Every time I get frustrated and start thinking Ira Roth is a delightful person. She says she is a romantic, believes in all the traditional values, masculine-feminine, flirting. I especially envy her charisma, her magnetic personality. Colin flitted between groups. The chemistry was entirely different tonight, even though the same people were present. No magic snowfall. A much larger separation between the writers and the students. Margaret Hollingsworth didn't even greet us this time. Colin came over, red-faced and brimming. He didn't stay long and we all dispersed into the night. Scatterlings.

April 6

Saw *Koyaanisqatsi* at Cinema V. Very powerful. Linked images, a dark stream, direct communication with the interior. "Koyaanisquatsi" is a Hopi word meaning crazy life, a life out of balance. The film bypassed any conventional plot of trivializing dialogue. All images. A man's face against the black hole of a fighter plane. The expression on his face, arrogant and completely unaware of what he has brought into being, the depths of that blackness filling the screen, dropping behind him. A plane shimmers, appears like a will-o-the-wisp, out of gasses in a marsh, a sinister insect, a ku klux klan hood.

Our mighty buildings, towers resemble computer cards. Once again we've projected our interior outwards. Cities as machines, computers, integrated circuits, colours streaking across the highways, fast, fast as fibre optics. And at the end on the warm walls of caves, drawings that resemble the drums of the nuclear plants. A world having a nervous breakdown. Circuits, nerves, arteries moving too fast, accelerated far past any sort of natural rhythm.

**

Borrowed *My Life* by Lyn Hejinian from Colin. It's wonderful, exactly the way I want to write, from the interior, the linking of ideas, symbols, impressions without the narrative padding I find so boring. It's the way I would have written "Monty" if I had known how to do it.

**

Received my astrology exam in the mail from André. It was full of comments. He went through it so thoroughly and added everything I had missed in the margins. Really touched by his generosity and conscientiousness.

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At Concordia, Colin, Sally and I were in the study room and Colin asked me if I, as well as my character in "Fibre Optics," was interested in astrology. I told him my favourite part was drawing the charts. He said he used to do quite a few charts but didn't so much now, because people are too interested in the fortune-telling aspect of it. We talked about chart interpretation, how so much depends on the approach. I said I found that the first thing you tell someone about their chart will emphasize that quality almost instantly. He agreed.

**

Reading Gertrude Stein. I really feel I am striking out into new directions. Really enjoyed reading *What Are Masterpieces*. It also feels as if I've cracked a secret code!

April 8

Last class, alas.

Michèle, Cathy, Darlene, Sally and I went to Carlo's and Pepe's. I am worried about Sally. Is she heading toward a breakdown? Her compulsive consumption; smoking, drinking, eating, the almost frantic stream-of-consciousness. Constant apologies for her behaviour. I'm sure a lot of it (if not all) has to do with the situation with her husband. All I know is that he is oppressively possessive. He accused Sally of having an affair with Darlene because she was late getting home one evening.

I don't know how those two met, but I really wish they hadn't. She's falling apart, a disintegration going on in front of me. She hides everything from the husband, including her friends, her smoking and drinking, but something she said really resonates with me, "You know how when people see you a certain way you don't want them to see another side. I'm a person who needs to be respected. If they saw me doing these things they would see me a different way and treat me different." She is intelligent and perceptive and I so hope her home situation improves.

Darlene reminds me of Jane Seymour. Beautiful stark bone structure. Now I know what that old cliché "good bones" actually means. She is mysterious to me, much more mature than the rest of us. She often says odd things and gets this intent look in her eyes. Darlene McRae Bedtime Stories. Someone drugged in a bar and almost sold to a prostitution ring in Saudi Arabia. A man in a pick-up bar took a beautiful woman to a hotel. She handcuffed him to the bed and a man in a Batman costume came out of a closet and raped him. Darlene's sister and a friend were assaulted by a man in a club line-up. They went into the club anyway and he kept returning to their table and continued the assault until he was finally ousted. Sally needs to make peace with the unconventional side of her nature, that attracts gay men and friends like Darlene. This moral, authoritarian world she is in right now is crushing her spirit. We left. Darlene escorted Sally to the Metro. For some reason, this made me think of Persephone. The rest of us slipped away into the night.

April 11

Party at Steven Frank's place. Lost in a labyrinth of streets clustered around Lambert-Closse. Finally flagged down an old woman walking a dog and got there. Lower Westmount, warm in the sun, quiet and sheltered, surrounded by shuttered windows, lamp-posts, window-boxes, turreted balconies, cul-de-sacs, very discreet private schools. Steven's apartment was beautiful, hardwood floors, high ceilings. He says the downstairs neighbours play Foreigner every day at dinner time, but the people upstairs play the piano beautifully. The hall to the bathroom seemed to go on for miles. Light streamed through the windows. The apartment is full of mementos of his around-the-world travels. There's a Gertrude Stein poem in the bathroom, a stellar record collection. "More meat!" Steven called out, a nurturing host, generous with food and drink. Everyone came except Marc Tessier and Anna Piccolo. Strange stories about Anna from Michèle. Apparently she has a power complex and uses people.

Good talk with Angela Hanna. She has a sweet face. Her writing and critiquing are sincere, careful and thorough. She is one of the best readers in the class. Ira told me in a rush of words that she thought I was intelligent, the most intelligent in the class, my writing was the best, the most talented and I would go far! "You make me blush," was the only response I could come up with, a phrase borrowed from Ellen Ryan. Long talk with Mary Fowke. She is going back to Bridgewater Nova Scotia for a while, then travelling in Europe. Mary told stories, something like the ones she writes for class, about people she meets in her travels. She says people always want to give her possessions of theirs; clothes in particular. I guess they see her soft loving quality. Mary's last story was wonderful; imagistic with a repeating menacing tone. Subliminal, suggestive, masterful use of understatement. Nameless, faceless people, a detached tone but with subtle glints of humour and colour. She's working on a cyclic piece, the themes circling back to each other, every paragraph another facet or surface of the same scene. She ended the cycle with this sentence, "The music he makes has no names; it can only be felt." Mary said she worries about the unintentional cruelty in her character sketches. Her descriptions are unsentimental and unflinching. I would never call them cruel.

Sally came careening in with a gaunt, saturnine Darlene at her side. We were all in our cups by this point. Good talk with Stephen Schettini. He said I was one of the best writers in the class “and I don’t say these things lightly.” He asked me how long I’ve been “in telecommunications.” He was in the same position, job-wise and had to leave his job in the afternoons to come to the class too. He said he’s not going to be a computer salesman much longer though. He’s going to try and make it as a professional writer, even taking the first step by attending Colin’s Kootenay School of Writing in Vancouver. He said I would likely make it. All compliments today! Darlene said Stephen and I were the best.

Talk with Colin about John Metcalf’s *Kicking Against the Pricks*. Colin said a book like that is a necessary jolt in some ways, but also destructive. Colin described Metcalf as a “cynical Englishman in Canada.” Yet his stories can be very tender.

The part ended and Sally was loath to leave. She was disintegrating again and spoke of spending the night. She had to leave early to go to another class and write an essay worth twenty per cent of her grade. Darlene put her coat on, picked up her books and told Sally to go. I told her to stay. “So you’re the devil,” said Colin, looking a little bemused. “There’s always an angel that sits on one shoulder. There has to be a devil on the other side,” I replied. “That’s true,” he said. Sally left, forgot her bag and came back. This time she took her coat off and Darlene said, “You told me to make sure you went. Now you put your coat on and come with me or I’ll slap you – I will.” She looked as if she meant it. I then told Sally she would regret it if she didn’t go, the party was winding down and only boring people were still hanging around. Sally then left.

Colin and I left at the same time. We walked to the Metro, me managing to keep pace with his long strides. We talked about making contacts with other writers, how to do it and why it is important. I said if I didn’t learn anything else from the course, I’ll know what it feels like to have someone respond to one of my stories. After all these compliments I don’t want the isolation again. We talked about sending out manuscripts and he told me to keep *Writing Magazine* in mind – the one he edits out in Vancouver. He also said if I sent him my work he would pass it along, giving me another contact.

While passing through Alexis Nihon, he said I have a fine sense of writing fiction and I should definitely continue and start sending manuscripts out. We talked about the class. He mentioned that Ira has a son. I said she was a delightful character. I said I thought Lila, Stephen, Sally and Steven Frank were the ones most serious about writing. Also told him I wanted to keep in touch with Lila because I so admired her work. He agreed it was wonderful and said it would be a good thing to keep in touch with her because she's feeling a little down about her age. Colin and I continued to talk on the Metro, then at Lionel-Groulx, where we ran into Fred. I've been invited to submit to *Writing!* Now I want to go to the colloquium in Vancouver in August! Lyn Hejinian will be there. Marc Lemay, Steven and Stephen are going. I don't feel like I had to say goodbye to Colin or the class. I feel as if things have just begun!

April 13

All day astrology workshop with Stase Michaels. She comes across as nice and feminine, but is strong-willed and persistent in proving her points and making sure we all see things her way. She reminds me of a gentle nurse who sees to it you take your medicine at the prescribed time. When we couldn't relate to what we discovered in our transits, she took our charts, went through the transits and made sure they fit the events – all done very smoothly. Interesting, the different personalities of astrologers. Donna Van Toen, straightforward, down-to-earth, plain talk. Paul Ostan Hewit, a more professional communicator, theoretical, brings in science fiction and makes astrology exciting and engaging.

Lunch with Susan. She mentioned that André had praised Gwen and me as being “right-on” and was rather dismissive about the others. I laughed and told her all he had said to the two of us was that we were “pretty good.” We talked about work. I mentioned Sally's husband who works at Pratt & Whitney. We also acknowledged the uneasiness we feel around each other, that almost electrical current. Her Mercury-Pluto is conjunct my Uranus in the 9th house, which squares my Sun-Mercury-Neptune in the 12th.

Both Uranus and Mercury have to do with the nervous system and indeed, my senses seem to go on full alert when she is around. She told me I came across as being “incredibly threatened” by her, but she soon caught on and knew to leave me alone, that I would take everything into my 12th House and I would be fine. “With the Uranus/Neptune/12th House influence, how could you see the same way as everyone else?” We tentatively arranged a lunch date.

**

André called. Astrology Part 3 is coming up this spring. Stephen Schettini called. He lost no time in setting up a meeting for the die-hards. We’re meeting at his place next Tuesday. Wheeze called. She and/or John and/or Bill may/may not visit this weekend.

**

Fred and I drove around Westmount. Medieval fortresses in the cold light of porch lights, lanterns in Plutonic darkness. Downtown, streets slippery, curbs dissolving, sidewalks drawn into light. Darkness of factories, warehouses, Victorian lettering, imprints on walls, ghosts of companies, fragments of once-important names, importers, exporters, wholesalers. Statue of some robber baron. Dickensian buildings with tiny barred windows. Neon sign at a garage, “Salon de beauté pour les autos” with a crazed octopus on top of a car, presumably fixing it with all eight tentacles.

April 20

Wheeze, John and their friend Bill came for a visit. John and Bill came to see the baseball game. We went to Da Giovanni for dinner and I thought Bill was going to make a scene over his bill, but he’s too passive-aggressive to do that. Instead he spent the rest of the evening complaining about it. We found a bar and walked in. it was like walking into the whale’s belly; black and scarlet. A cavern with coloured lights, candles flickering on the table. Curved walls, rounded corners, riblike ceilings, a woman with a lovely voice sang and played guitar. I was so distracted by my surroundings I couldn’t even guess at what any of us were talking about.

Next day, Wheeze spent the afternoon with us while John and Bill attended another game. We drank wine and talked about sports spectators, children, then over old ground, Queen's, Elrond, Sharon, Esther, Val, etc. John and Bill returned, and then they were all gone again.

April 22

To André's apartment for Stage 3. This time there's only three of us; Robert Philion, Joe and me, so it feels a little impersonal and awkward. André's apartment is huge and his girlfriend and baby daughter move around behind the scenes. A TV switched on, the baby cried, two worlds orbiting each other in one apartment. André's study is neat and trim, very much like him. Some plants in the corner, soft ferny shadows on a dusky wall. Outside the buildings seemed to swim up to me and then sink back into darkness. Got on the St-Laurent bus and went the wrong way, north, way past Crémazie station. Two deserted bus stops, one by a vacant lot near train tracks, the other in front of a warehouse, an office building, an inexplicable shoe store with little red-strapped shoes in the window. A tiny diner. Back down St-Urbain. So relieved to be on familiar ground again.

April 23

Beautiful day. John Eckerlin took me out to the river and we sat on the rocks near a spot where I used to go with Jim. I imagined running into him there. John told me about his sister and said I reminded him of her. We talked about work, and Bob's offer of a production job. We talked about Ken. He said Ken was nice but too immaculate. I said Ken was afraid to let himself go, to be out of control and the body-building had something to do with that. It's fun playing amateur psychologist with John.

**

Went to Concordia to pick up my final class portfolio. Colin's note was wonderful. His kindness made me cry and I wandered around downtown with tears in my eyes.

"Lesley -

It has been a joy to have you in the workshop this past semester. Your work has always been strong, and these revisions make it stronger still.

I've made some little notes here and there, pointing out one or two things, but apart from these I'd say almost all these stories are finished. It occurs to me that some editors might say they are too long – a case could be made for this with "The Polar Bear Express" for instance, although I don't think I would agree. You might be ready for such a comment anyway.

I do hope you'll send some of these out – don't send more than one (at most two) story to any magazine – if they want to see more they'll ask.

And keep writing – write, write, write, write. I think you have a solid and deserved career as a writer ahead of you and I look forward to reading your work over the coming years. I'm especially interested to see what happens to "Fiber Optics" and whatever else comes in the wake of Lyn Hejinian.

If you decide to come back for more prose workshops next year I suggest you find your way to Elizabeth Spencer's class. She would be one who could really give you a hand and I suspect she'd like your work too.

All the best, and thank you,
Colin Browne"

**

Class meeting at Stephen Schettini's. Nine of us came and we all had stories or material from our final portfolios to read. Colin was there in spirit. Stephen is very attractive; sexy. Lean, olive-skinned, chiselled features. He's thirty-two years old some of us thought he was older; he seems that much more mature and experienced than the rest of us – except Darlene. His apartment is austere, and although he is supposedly married, there is no sign of a wife. There is no feminine presence in this apartment at all.

Darlene read a “George and Claude” story. Her writing has a clarity to it. It is unsentimental and realistic. I am particularly interested in how differently men and women react to her work. All of the men think her characters are bitter and/or cynical. The women leaped to Darlene’s defense and said the character was realistic and just seeing her situation the way she had to, to keep herself from succumbing to a sad fate. I recognized myself as a teenager in the story. In fact, I think that characters who seem to be realistic, hard, cynical, etc, are the most vulnerable. They are the ones who retain a vision of another future, another way of life, another self. The men just find the stories cynical, unpleasant or even immoral. They seem to use the device of the myth, legend or tale more than the women, making a larger, more archetypal analogy. That makes sense to me, since they run the world, why wouldn’t they be writing myths and archetypes? I didn’t say this at the meeting, though.

Michèle also wrote something about men and power, but in a completely different style than Darlene’s scathing realism. Michèle’s take was imaginative, poetic. It made a powerful statement about control, passivity, yet done entirely through poetic images. Needless to say, the critics wanted more realism and spent a lot of time correcting her English. I loved her piece exactly as she wrote it, and changing “golden fish” to “goldfish” would have stripped the magic away and ruined it.

Here are excerpts from the longer work:

“Fish, fish

Sharks

Golden fish

Sharks eat golden fish

Sharks eat men too

Men eat women ...

I’m learning how to swim

I’m a small fish

Small fish can hide

Small fish can escape clumsy fishermen

“Proud
Proud to be a small fish after all
Number 3 offers me his chair
Louis XIV
A throne?
For Queen Neptune?
The eleventh man is Right?
Of course
He is
Right
Right?”

Sally spent most of the evening worrying about what her husband was going to say later. She read a story that cast a shadow on the entire evening, partly because she was so unaware of what she was saying, of any kind of deeper meaning attached to it. Her unawareness and insensitivity to the connotations of this story were depressing, if not downright frightening. This was another Pat and Charles story, as usual an anecdote taken from her own life, not meant as anything more than a cheery slice-of-life about dogs and a sunny day. All fine. I actually enjoy the adventures of Pat and Charles, or find them fascinating in a daft way.

But about a third of the way through this story, the narrator started talking about hunting down Jews and attending Hitler Youth parties. My jaw dropped. When we questioned her, she said blithely, “Oh yeah, Charles hates Jews. That’s just a little game they like to play. And the Hitler Youth parties, let me explain. These go on every year and everyone gets dressed up in costumes.” (!!!!) This story was never submitted to the class, and I wonder how Colin would have dealt with it.

Not only did Sally seem oblivious to these implications in real life, she had no sense of how these characters would appear in a work of fiction. Even if the Holocaust means nothing to her personally, except fun and games, how could she not understand that the reader could not possibly perceive them as being light playful characters?

This was like throwing a bomb into the story. All of a sudden, Nazis! Hitler Youth! To her, these details were only character traits. Yet there they are, sitting in her subconscious, appearing without any integration. Can one be that unaware of the Zundel, Keegstra controversies, etc, etc – or maybe she’s simply never made any connection between her life and the external world. Anyway, I was shocked. You never ever know what will come out of Sally, but I wasn’t expecting this.

**

Val called. She made up some story about trying for months to get in touch with me. She also said everything short of saying she wanted to stay in our apartment without us being there. She sounded surprised to hear that Fred wasn’t in photography any more. She reacted exactly the same way last time I told her Fred had quit newspaper photography.

Fred and I went to a party with his friends, Dave and Claire, and two of their school friends. About ten minutes after we returned to our apartment, Val and her latest, Dan Cottenden, arrived. Dan did indeed go to my high school. He wasn’t in my year and we didn’t remember anything about each other. We went as a foursome to le Croissant de lune and Dan was pleasant. Val and I started talking about Jim and there was a warm moment before we split off into pairs (Val being quite blatant about getting rid of us.)

**

Astrology Phase 3 not going well. I don’t understand progressions at all, nor can I do the math. I suspect I’m not very interested in this aspect of astrology. I called André and said I was sick, but I don’t think I can carry on with the class.

May 7

Another meeting at Stephen Schettini’s. I was the first to arrive and we talked quite comfortably about Sharon Sparling (the Concordia success story and protegee of Elizabeth Spencer) and writing in general. It was a group of five tonight; Stephen, Lila, Michèle. Marc Lemay and I.

Lila said we were all the ones whose work she really liked and wanted to see more of, and here we were. Sally Qureshi (Murray) has gone home to New Brunswick for a month. Marc LeMay arrived. The first thing he said when he came in was that he had seen the marks posted at Concordia and Colin had given out only one A. We speculated on who it could be. Marc is nothing if not ambitious, and already seems like an established writer. Had a good talk with him and Michèle about writing at night.

I read “Ant Colony.” It was received very well by the group, Stephen in particular. He read out the part about the people in the park looking like statues commemorating something, and loved this sentence’s juxtaposition with the crematoria of Bavaria and Italy. He said it was the word “commemorate” which did the work and made that link. He said the prose was beautiful and may be my best writing. He then said my writing has a “factual quality” to it, “almost scientific in its precision,” and I described the natural world like a botanist. He also senses political overtones in my work. I’m not sure what he means by that since my writing is completely apolitical.

We talked about astrology. He showed me his chart, which was drawn in a similar style as mine. He has a powerful chart; Leo sun, Scorpio ascendant with Mars on the ascendant square Pluto. Issues of power and authority and important to him. In class, when we talked about nuclear war, he said survival would be the ultimate test, adding wryly that he would likely survive even if he didn’t want to.

He looked as if he relished the prospect. He read a revised version of “The Iceman,” an archetypal “Sturm und Drang” confrontation, a man facing the father in himself and breaking a lifetime pattern through a meeting with the Minotaur. It was an intense, obsessive story, exhausting to listen to. Rumbles of thunder in the distance, silver streaks of rain on the window. He himself had gone through hell writing that story, based on a real period in his life. He said it is a “horrible story,” one he had to write at the time, but one he doesn’t want to deal with again.

May 9

BHCL has changed a lot since the arrival of three new employees. Everyone is dressed more formally and even John is wearing a tie and jacket. There have been a number of staff meetings in which Joe stands up and tells everyone how they have to increase productivity and “run a tight ship,” and Bob undoes it all by chiding his employees and embarrassing them in front of the new guys. I wonder how Joe feels about this, if he’s even noticed how his motivational speeches are undermined.

Roger is a new consultant, in his fifties or so. He is charming and chivalrous in an old-fashioned way with a big cheery good morning for everyone in the office. He is French-Canadian and calls himself a “gar” and a “pepsi.” Richard, on the other hand, is awful. He’s a glad-handing hypocrite who won’t deign to say good morning to the peasants (John and me). He is fond of racist and sexist jokes, which crack Claire up, so she is at her worst, sputtering and wheezing like a kettle about to boil over.

Called Concordia to see about taking intensive French courses this summer. A session is coming up in July. I’ve got to seriously work toward leaving here, year or no year, resumé be damned. I can’t keep going like this, making up fake work in a place where I have no responsibility or role to play. I’ll bet anything Jeffcott lies about the position to his clients, brags about having an information-research position. Exactly the way he sold it to me. Jeffcott is bad enough with his condescending and demeaning attitudes, but the addition of these three marketers is eroding the camaraderie in the office, which was the one great thing about working here.

Joe, in his own way, is interesting. We all thought he was in his mid-forties when he started because he is more middle-class than the middle-class. He talks about his great big car. His hair is cut very short, and he wears pin-striped suits to an office located in an apartment building where tenants wander in dressed in their house coats and slippers. Mary was also shocked to find out he’s only thirty-two, but everything about him seems at least ten years older; his values in life, his devotion to work, his sense of responsibility and sense of decency. He carries a photo around with him and actually takes it out and looks at it every so often. I hope it’s a picture of his father and not some motivational speaker.

He gives stirring talks on productivity, glib and charming where Jeffcott is ponderous and offensive to his employees. Joe doesn't take lunch because he says he has no need for it. Mary warned him not to neglect his family and get caught up in Jeffcott's "extracurricular fun and games." Joe says he has no interest in spending social time with Bob (or anyone else) whatsoever. He doesn't drink and I overheard him tell Jeffcott he has no need "for the cigar and brandy after meetings."

Odd day at work today (shock). Claire's son's teacher called to inform her that Sean was skipping classes. This is not the first time this teacher has called Claire at work. Claire is urging the school to suspend Sean because "I have washed my hands of him." Right after this call, Claire's mother called and they got into a fight. Claire hung up, marched over to Mary and me and declared that her mother was a "sarcastic bitch."

Outside the madhouse, everything was beautiful, a bus driver helped an old man across the street, a woman picked up an empty bottle and placed it in the garbage can. When I looked into a restaurant window I saw the waitress smiling and laughing with a customer. I need to get out of this pressure chamber, but this is my first library job and I haven't even made a year yet. On the positive side, though, both Mary and Claire told me how nice I looked and how attractive my new hair cut was. Claire even said I was cute like Leslie Caron. If only.

**

I was the one who received the A from Colin.

**

Saw *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean*, directed by Robert Altman. To me it's a movie about fronts, surfaces, deceptions. Everytime the screen door is opened, it feels as if the blazing heat or torrential rain outside are too much for the bell-jar world of the characters. The outside world is hazy, huge and vast with watercolour trees sponged into an ethereal background, conveying an atmosphere of diffusion, lostness, an erasure of everyday human objects and concerns. Memories are more real than the present.

The terrifying face of Sandy Dennis, pale as putty, eyes almost reptilian at times. I could easily picture her in *The Glass Menagerie* with the tinkly music in the background, walking that same line between fantasy and a brutal sort of reality. Karen Black's oracular look. It is an enchanted five and dime, straight out of a fairytale with candy-coloured rafters, gingerbread surfaces. The fronts and fantasies are stripped away in the course of an evening. Now there's nothing to do but wait as the intensity builds, everything suspended in amber light, the colour of a cat's eye, a light that has lasted too long and is about to burn out, taking the five and dime with it.

May 13

Went to a Timothy Findley reading at Beaconsfield Library. The library was stiflingly hot and we sat on elementary school chairs. Isn't this a solidly middle-class suburb? The Barrie public library was so much better than this. I guess this is what public libraries are like without Carnegie's boost. Anyway, Findley was generous, reading excerpts from his work as if for the first time. He seems like a very emotional man. Sweat trickled down the side of his face. His responses to people's questions were heartfelt and inspiring to me. I was surprised by the depth of his responses especially considering the uncomfortable venue.

I was especially interested in his responses to questions about his writing process. When an idea comes to him he will not manipulate it. If he does, it will become false, artificial, clever for the sake of sounding clever. Instead, Findley waits, listens to it so it finds its own voice and can come out the way it was meant. You listen to the story, to the voice - not to the world. He said that sometimes doing the hardest thing in the world to do is turn down the noise to listen to the voice of your heart.

He works in sections, refines each one before moving on, calls this process "brick-laying." He also admitted he's superstitious. He was wearing a scarf in the sweltering library because the one time he didn't wear it at a reading, all the pages fell out of his binder. Someone asked why the women in his stories are unhappy or crazy. He replied that women have had a raw deal throughout history; they are not really crazy, but in some way dissatisfied with what they had, and aware of more they could be in life. He said they were wonderful people who became subverted.

Terry Garwood from Colin's class was at the reading, looking trim, dapper and watchful. He told Fred I was a "real little whippersnapper" to have the energy to go from work to class and get my writing in for the week. I've always felt he liked me and his comments on "Fibre Optics" were very gallant and touching. I think he identifies me with Crissy.

**

Saw Jim Mills get out of his Volvo at Peel Cycle. My heart stopped. He looked slimmer and he was wearing the black jacket he wore when he first arrived at Elrond. His hair has been cut. He looks so much better than he did the last time I saw him.

**

Fight-or-flight response triggered. As soon as I stepped off the bus I spotted Jeffcott driving up to the office. I ducked into the Perrette dépanneur and elaborately fixed a cup of coffee so I wouldn't run into him. I was rewarded by seeing Kevin's friendly face instead. Speaking of Kevin, Jeffcott is now constantly giving him time-consuming drudge-work. He often wanders out into my area or stands in his doorway with a perplexed look on his face.

Just some random thoughts on another work day with nothing to do. Sometimes I suspect that the real reason I lost interest in christianity or belonging to a christian group is because the people all look the same. They dress like office employees in polka-dot blouses and little bows, gold or silver crosses, or blow-dried TV news anchor hair cuts and aviator glasses. Why is this? You can't tell a Baptist from a Jehovah's Witness or Christian Scientist. When you become a member of an established religious group, do you naturally give up your own identity? Or do religions attract people who have no sense of individuality?

Of course there are times when I wish I could be like everyone else. There is something deep inside me that makes people sense that I am not like them. No matter how I try to blend in, laugh in the right places, declare my fellowship, people sense my foreignness. "Not you," said Mr Beltz in the car on the way home from school, "You're sensitive." Ira telling me I was the most intelligent person in the class, then embracing everyone except me. I guess a walking brain like me would be mortally offended by such a physical gesture as a hug.

Today at work when John was telling Kevin about his marital break-up, he covered my ears. One of the few memories I haven't repressed of grade eight is being called "sweet and innocent." I always felt like a china doll or the class pet.

I started writing these journals because of Jim (and Anais Nin') and now I have a life and can just be me. The last time I talked with Susan, she said I was lucky, that in spite of how mundane work may be I have a life outside it and that so many others do not have another, finer world to escape into, to draw strength from. And that is where my strength comes from – the good legacy of the 12th House. Neither of us could imagine having the will to live if our other worlds did not exist. And circling back to my first question about religious groups, maybe they all look and act the same because the people who join those groups don't have that outlet.

Week of May 20

Marsha called. She sounded cheerful at first and I babbled about cleaning the oven. Ernie Musgrave was killed in a car accident yesterday while Sharon was visiting Stratford with a friend.

Picked up Marsha in Kingston. We just babbled to fill in the space. If either of us ever had to choose someone this would happen to, it would be Sharon. There's no way to rationalize this, no way of trying to make it sound better than it is, this is about as horrible as it gets in life. Only twenty months ago we were in the same car together, travelling to their wedding. Ernie was such an individual, they both were, they had so much growing to do as a couple.

The drive was long and tedious, unbearably hot and muggy rain after Kingston. The sun started coming out around Oshawa and by the time we got to Whiteoaks apartment complex we saw the most stunning complete double rainbow any of us has ever seen. Holiday weekend Toronto traffic, radio peppered with news of accidents, fender-benders, bad weather.

Sharon was fatalistic, immersed in duty, phoning people, making endless arrangements, a dull heartbreaking expression on her face. She kept asking her little budgie, Twinkie, “Where’s your special friend?” Ernie’s birthday would have been June 6. Sharon had drawn a heart around the date on her calendar. It is so hard to grasp this kind of finality. Ernie will never ever come in through that door again and there’s no way of reaching him. Marsha said she kept thinking this was going to be “Heaven Can Wait” and they’d realize they’d taken the wrong person.

Also eerie to see the same people at the wake and funeral who were so recently at the wedding. Death ripples into so many lives. All the people connected with Ernie and Sharon; Ernie’s school, Sharon’s work. Flo flew in from Calgary for the funeral. Peggy Smythe came from Ottawa and seeing her brought on another round of tears, she was such a familiar face. Ernie’s band member, Wayne, standing alone at the casket. Ernie’s mother, Thea, always looks a little lost, dazed by the outside world, but Sharon said she was holding up surprisingly well. Brother Edwin stood hunched and crooked, interrogating Thea as to who everyone was. Marsha, Fred, Gail, Mr Thorpe and Betty all fled his suspicious eyes. They played “Moon River” at the funeral, and I will never even think of this song without weeping. First time i’ve ever been in a funeral procession. In the sunlight it’s hard to believe we are acting in an ordinary day for other people. Resentment toward other people laughing in their cars or cutting into line.

I have forgotten how intense and attached Sharon can become to people or things. Her rational way of communicating makes you forget the more obsessive emotions and ritualistic actions. She is constantly re-creating herself, taking on the likes, dislikes and even the personal characteristics of her friends. She dresses beautifully and says she takes twenty minutes to put her makeup on every morning. “It makes you feel worse if you don’t do it,” she says.

She is coping with Ernie’s death with fatalism and saturnine control. “This is just another shitty thing dumped on me.” “It would have been a lot worse if we had parted on bad terms.” “I haven’t been given more than I can take.” “All I’ve ever wanted in my life is to be a normal person.”

Maybe it would be better if we could sit in a circle for three days and weep and wail until the grief washed out of our systems, instead of having to carry on as if things were normal. Except they're not, and everything is interrupted by these pangs of grief. Seeing Sharon's calendar, collecting Ernie's shirts from his laundry, feeding Twinkie. Normal yet not at all normal. There has been something tribal about this week. Fred and I camped out in the living room and Marsha sleeping with Sharon. Tents pitched in the dark hills with the wind in the olive trees, the race that knows Joseph.

The week has lasted forever. Every time I look in the mirror I expect to find my hair has become snow-white and we have been here for twenty years and the rest of the world has passed us by. Death, grief, a timeless state. I felt so delicate leaving the apartment and walking down St. Clair. Marsha pictured us as characters from "The Wizard of Oz." Fred, the Tin Man; me, the scarecrow (because of my big heart); Wheeze, the Cowardly Lion (because of her rages) with Sharon as Dorothy and Twinkie as Toto.

Unlike Sharon, Marsha does not believe in fate. She does not believe Ernie was meant to die and that death happens at random. I don't know. Ernie was the most careful person imaginable. If he had taken another road, or the same road five minutes later, nothing would have happened. He disliked driving, whereas Fred and John live in cars. What are the odds of Ernie being killed at the wheel of a car? But if it's random, there are no odds. All I can say is that the universe has a black sense of humour.

We went out to the zoo and the fresh air and sunshine did us all a world of good. We laughed at the people and at times, Sharon would snort and nudge me just like the old days, but "it" is never far away, the shadow that surrounds all our talk, our activity. Sharon's sister Gail arrived. As Marsha said, "Whenever Gail is around I feel like a complete goombah." Called Lynn Sinclair. She has a lovely speaking voice. She dreamed about me the other night, that I was working in a laundry. She had wondered what might be going on in my life that would make her think of me cleaning clothes.

It was almost amusing, the number of slips we all made. I walked in on Fred, who was sleeping on the couch, and said, "Oh look, there's a dead Fred." Sharon winced. Marsha said something later about killing John if he hadn't made a phone call. I never thought about how full of death imagery and expressions our language is. We sat around the kitchen table, talking. At times the conversation would flare up and it would be like normal, then "it" would come back, bigger, heavier and even more inconsolable. A shimmer of tears in her eyes, a heartbreaking lost look. Marsha and I kept her company while Fred very unobtrusively dismantled our little camp to make way for Gail's arrival. Then an "obituary ghoul" phoned her about the apartment and all the facade dropped away. She couldn't talk any more and was terrified of staying in the apartment with only her sister there. We knew she was in good hands with Gail and we made the break. We embraced and the three of us wept in each other's arms.

Gail is a nurse – and a Virgo. She's a very capable person, has no tolerance for stupidity and she thinks the three of us (Marsha, Fred and I) are bizarre. She was Sharon's bulwark at the wake. The sisters stood united, arms linked, the two brothers in the background. Gail's widely spaced light eyes and facial expressions remind me of Sandy Dennis in "Jimmy Dean." Similar mannerisms, too, the way she ducks her head after saying something, the way she appears to be uttering asides to herself, the contrast between her delicate appearance and the earthiness of her talk and expressions.

Miserable drive back to Kingston. We are emotionally and physically exhausted but we are the lucky ones. We have places to go, lives to resume. This is Sharon's life now. We talked a bit but withdrew into our own thoughts. I started reading a magazine called *Impulse*, which I picked up in Toronto. It was a special issue on death and included articles on the city morgue of Paris, the meaning of guns, mass murder and necrophilia. Very strong stuff. Although I was in the same car with Marsha and Fred, I was really on a dark journey without them.

Stopped in Kingston and Marsha gave us tea and sandwiches. She is now talking about spending her holidays with Sharon. Marsha has always felt responsibility for Sharon's happiness, although she would vehemently claim the opposite. She also takes the whole structure of marriage very seriously, something else she denies.

May 27

Life continues but it feels so very unreal swinging from bus to metro, as if I'd been sick for a long time. Thank goodness for work, Mary and Kevin's gentleness, Claire's instinctive empathy. While I was away John was served divorce papers by his wife, Debbie. He says he is glad to be out of that relationship. She cited "physical and mental cruelty" and he says she committed adultery four times. Jeffcott surprised me by calling me into his office and asking about Sharon. He genuinely seemed sympathetic and said he would cover my expenses. Go figure.

Forgot to mention that I called Andrea on our way home from Toronto. She sounded happy to hear from me but low. This was the 10th anniversary of the death of her son Howard. I told her about Sharon and her reaction was deep and true. We talked about writing and she was thrilled to hear about Janet Turnbull's response to my novel She talked about how proud she'll be "to have known me when." She is working full-time at Scugog Library, which means an easing up in their financial situation, no commuting and best of all the variety of working in a public library.

May 31 to June 1

Severe lightning storm and incredible circular winds. Went for pizza at Romano's and the lightning could split the streets open. On the way back into Montréal we turned on the CBC radio. Barrie and surrounding area was hit by a tornado. Hardest hit was Alliston area. Tried calling my parents but could not get through; all circuits busy.

Got through to Barrie this morning, had a nice talk with my Dad. Everyone is okay. Allandale was hardest hit with houses all around Marshall Street completely flattened. Highways are closed and there's no way of getting in or out of the city. In fact, the tornado was so localized, my parents didn't realize it was happening, only thought they were getting a bad storm. The army was called in to prevent looting. It is hard to think of Barrie as a place needing disaster relief!

My father asked about us and I told him about Ernie. He was grave and respectful. He asked when we were coming to visit and mentioned another balloon-fest in July. I said that sounded like a plan. He is extremely uncomfortable on the phone so I pretended I was the Professor and brought the conversation to a graceful close. It was good to hear his voice, though. He's been on my mind lately, but he sounded quite cheerful.

June 1

Fred and I were having cappuccino and cheesecake at Terre Étoile when I noticed Susan Kelly, Deena Grier and various members of the Astrological Society of Montréal filing upstairs. André's girlfriend, Chantal, arrived with the baby. Strawberry blond hair, big blue eyes and a little strawberry birthmark on her forehead. Went to see what was going on and sure enough, it was a lecture. On impulse, I decided to stay and was glad I did as it was the last lecture until fall.

Alan Annand spoke about the sex lives of famous people, connecting notorious events in well-known lives with aspects and configurations in their charts. It was interesting and fun albeit superficial. The second lecture was on Uranian astrology by Ken Tasa. This was an introduction to a whole new set of planetary energies with names such as Cupido, Vulcanus, Poseidon. They seem to function like the Moon's nodes and are combinations of planetary traits, e.g., Hades blends the Moon and Saturn. Susan likes them because they are synthesis points and a short cut to seeing the levels at which an individual is operating from. In most cases the aspects in a chart would give the same theme, but these points are a quick (Uranian) way of seeing straight through to the heart of the matter.

Talked with Susan about Ernie and all the events surrounding the tragedy. Also told her about the tornado. "Oh Lesley," she said. "I remember hearing that on the radio and for some reason it really stood out in my mind. I knew I knew someone from there." The first thing she asked was where Uranus was, as both events were incredibly abrupt, unexpected and devastating.

I told her about Seal Books and Colin and she seemed very excited for me. Talked about Saturn in the 12th and on the Ascendant and how things will change once it goes into the 1st House. I love her sense of humour so much. I have occasionally called her, hoping not to get her so I can hear her answering machine messages!

June 2

Talked with Sir Jefforie about the tornado. He said he dreamed about me last night and was going to call me later today. It's good to check in with Sir J every so often. I told him about Ernie, and about Val and Dan Cottenden. He told me some confusing, rather alarming news about the Professor and Ron. When Jeff was off work because of the beer strike in Ontario, Janet kept urging him to rent her and Ron's house. She was talked about her and Ron moving into a trailer in a park near the Driftwood Restaurant. Sir J and I wondered in dismay if they are broke. I wonder if this is why I haven't heard from them since our get-together last Christmas.

Fred's mother called to find out if my family was okay. This is the first time she has ever expressed any genuine interest in me or my family. She sounded kind of odd and seemed to have trouble pronouncing some words. Maybe she was into the sherry, or maybe she doesn't talk with very many people and is lapsing back into Dutch. Whatever the case, I found her much easier to take than usual. I told her about Ernie and she told me how she had been there when her friend's husband had died of cancer, and all the things she had had to do. She went on for a long time about all these things she did but when I finally interjected and said it was scary, she agreed and her tone sounded heartfelt. For once I felt as if I was connecting with a real person, not just a endless loop of trivia and resentments.

June 5

Kevin has been my ally at work. Bob infuriated me by making me spend all day cutting and pasting, then redoing the entire thing because it wasn't what he expected. This is exactly the sort of job which used to infuriate Ken, and I am so glad he escaped.

In my mind I composed manifestoes, led a union, walked out in a cold rage after telling Jeffcott off in words that rang with passion and justice. I am so sick and tired of the sexist racist attitudes here, those supercilious marketing jerks. I miss Ken – he was honest, decent and not sexist. Later Kevin joined me and we were both cutting and pasting. I suggested that maybe we should demand a sandbox and he started to laugh. After that, humour carried us through the day. At one point Kevin was cutting out a square of cardboard. I came up, stamped my foot and said, "How come I never get any of these big green things to cut?" Howard then chimed in, "Two putzes are better than one." Kevin has a fine sense of humour. He is gentle, good-natured and among the last of the "liberals" in the office. We have similar personality traits, both often losing things and pondering the absurdity of it all.

John is off on some kind of ego trip, or martyr road show. I understand that his self-esteem must be taking a clobbering these days due to the divorce, but he is driving me crazy with his self-aggrandizing statements. "A lesser man would have walked out but I kept coming back," or how about "When I give my heart I give it forever but I guess I'll never find anyone out there who's equal to it."

June 9

Phoned Kim Jackson on her birthday and she was happy to hear from me. She had been going through some old cards I sent her and was thinking of me. She did indeed go to London with Ellen and Mika. They had a great time. Mika met a man there and spent most of the time out with him. I imagine Mika at her most sophisticated in Europe. Going by photographs, she shines when she's abroad. Mika is so many people. Tense, fretful, swearing like a trooper at a petty annoyance. Gentle, wise, understanding. Self-absorbed and insulated. Sophisticated and fashionable. She changes like light on water.

As usual with Kim, news is sketchy. One moment she said the Group had all lost touch, the next saying she is seeing everyone next week. She mentioned taking a picture of some “really cute punkish” shoes she bought in London and telling Ellen they were “Lesley-shoes.”

June 12

Went to Stephen Schettini’s. Threesome tonight; Stephen, Lila and I. A wintry atmosphere, perhaps because of my white skirt, the austerity of Stephen’s apartment, Lila’s silvery hair. It felt like winter and half-expected to see snow out the window. The three of us talked and talked about writing. Stephen has made a breakthrough with his latest story. The same archetypal story line, taboo, quest of Plutonian descent still present, but the writing itself is much less stiff. He uses shorter, more direct sentences. The voice is of a man S’s age directly confronting these themes. You can still see the duality between control and release, austerity and worldliness, but there has been a breakthrough and the prose has become unblocked until it races away to the end. Stephen said he has been working toward letting go and writing from his heart.

Read my long story “Cut-Outs.” It is becoming a novella, influenced by Guy Davenport in form. I had trouble writing this story. It is in segments and I had to discipline myself to sit down long enough to finish one segment at a time. I felt detached, almost disinterested while writing it, but when I read it aloud I started trembling. I found myself retreating deep within myself, so much so everything around me, including Lila and Stephen blurred. I felt as if I was underwater. The story is emotional, containing details from my memory. I can’t think of anything else I’ve ever written that seems so different between writing it and reading it aloud.

Lila: questions, questions, questions! She asks us questions with the intensity of a police interviewer. She had me babbling about my novel, the Seal letter. We also talked about the pits we fall into. Hers is insecurity about her age and ability. Mine is also feeling that I’m not good enough, and also it siphons energy I should be using to get a better job.

Stephen's is distractions, sitting down and writing, letting his feelings come through. He says he is at the point now where he can recognize when something is coming out of his head and he is only going through the motions. He now discards these sections as worthless! Lila and I left Stephen's together, both elated at spending an evening talking about writing with real writers.

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At work I made Kevin laugh by telling him my dream. I dreamed it was night and I was in the car with Fred. We came to a cross road and were cut off by an enormous truck. We were curious about a truck this size out in the middle of nowhere and when I peered inside the cab, I discovered that Michael Wilson, the finance minister, was driving it. I hate this government so much I am now dreaming about it. Well, Mulroney and cronies are taking more flak than they thought by their inhumanity to senior citizens. Now that they've gone after old people and children, the only thing left is to come out and kick a few dogs. A gang of cowards and bullies.

June 17

Barbeque at Fred's brother Eric's house. Bob was there but he made an effort to be civil to Fred and was actually nice and solicitous toward me. He retains a lot of hurt and childhood grudges. These grudges are like poison and his humour is biting and belittling, fed from insecurity. He made some sharp remarks about Eric and I was surprised when Fred's mother spoke up and took Bob to task. I have never heard her stand up for anyone before. I think this barbecue was more successful this time because of the presence of Eric's girlfriend Toni, who is friendly; a welcome buffer.

Some of Fred's Michigan cousins were also there; Carol, Don and Peter. Carol didn't seem quite as insufferable this time. In fact, she prevented Bob from wholly taking over the bbq. What usually happens at any of these dinners is the Bob takes control and the Valkyrie smiles and nods in complicity as he belittles all and sundry.

Eric was in the kitchen preparing food and Bob tried to be crowd-pleaser, entertainer, raconteur, occasionally succeeding, but most of the time too sharp and wounding without the playful mischief of Howard. When it was time to leave, Bob approached me and asked nicely, humbly, how the car was, how I felt about living in Montréal. He even expressed sympathy because I wasn't close to my family.

21-24 June

To Toronto to visit Sharon. We arrived late. Marsha and John were in and it was an intimate atmosphere. Sharon greeted us cheerfully, but she has lost a lot of weight and just seems very fragile. Long satisfying talks with Sharon. She is always curious about the world around her. Long talk about fate and coincidences. Ernie's brother Alan believes that if there is a god, it is a cruel and sadistic one, and any of us could be the next to go. Sharon believes very strongly that it was fated, it had to happen and there is a meaning we have to derive from it, somehow. She has reversed her position on the paranormal and believes just as doggedly in ghosts and ESP as she used to debunk them. Instinctively I had recommended *The Deptford Trilogy* by Robertson Davies. As I suspected, she loved it and has been voraciously reading all his books. They may very well have influenced her new outlook.

Back in the Talking Room, the hot room where the sweat makes my back stick to the foam pad mattress and Fred's arm across me like a heavy strap. I try sleeping but then it starts up again; the loudest TV in the world where the blating penetrates right through me, lunatic voices babbling in my own mind, giving me insane instructions, acting out bizarre dramas, zombie voices speaking in jingles.

Marsha and John left. Sharon and I made our way to Queen Street, where we potted through the great second-hand bookstores and I ogled Ms Emma's designs. We slunk through office buildings and tunnels to avoid the cold gristly rain.

We went to see *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Interesting movie, reminded me of the Simenon I recently read, *The Man Who Watched the Trains Go By*. Both stories feature people who have denied or sublimated their feelings for so long, they didn't realize they had come to the end until the event occurred, which served as a catalyst, starting them irrevocably on another path. There is a strong element of fate or destiny about these stories.

Went to Harbourfront. Sharon loves to walk around, watch people, look at things. She points things out, identifies them. She has a great need to be familiar with everything in her world, to know everything, to establish order, routine, duties. Ritualistic. She becomes very distressed when placed in unpredictable situations. Then you can see her eyes glaze over as if she had stepped into another dimension of time.

That said, I love walking around Toronto with Sharon. Fred and I stayed until Monday and drove Sharon to her work. We got to see her dressed up in her historical costume. Ernie was right – it really does suit her. With Sharon, conversation never runs dry. We talked and talked forging a bond with words until it was painfully difficult to leave.

Stopped in Kingston for dinner with Marsha and John. Marsha's job is driving her crazy. The relationship with her boss has blown up and the other women are "snoops and spies." The "office harpies" won't leave her alone. Marsha's immediate boss will not stand up for her and there are no established rules. Marsha is spontaneous and emotional. However, there is also something disciplined and moralistic about her. She has strong principles, always drawing lines in the sand, "I will never." Her job is falling apart, just as Fred's library tech program at John Abbott did. He received a letter from the director suggesting that he was "too advanced" for the program and that perhaps it was a good idea for him not to come back. And so it goes.

June 25

Lila, Marc Lemay, Ira and I met at Stephen's. This has become a tenacious supportive little group. I read a short story, "The Witch Tree" and they were so generous with their comments. Ira said she was "enthralled by the story." Lila said it was a "tour de force" and Stephen said it was my ticket into Elizabeth Spencer's course.

No one is ever in a great hurry to leave our meetings. They last all evening, sometimes past midnight, when someone, usually Lila, who is an English teacher at Dawson College, needs to go home. Stephen is a computer salesman, Marc is a waiter on Crescent Street and I work at BHCL. We could stay up all night talking about writing and life. At one point Lila, Stephen and Ira got into a heated discussion of racial stereotypes and sexism. Stephen believes in Jungian archetypes, Ira is a strong proponent of the power of conventional femininity, and Lila is liberal to the core, as passionate as Andrea Jones in defending her beliefs. Stephen teased Lila, said he knew she must have Uranus on the Ascendant. Marc and I, the two youngest, sat back and didn't say much. Marc says he is "allergic to politics," and I am a terrible debater.

June 29

Sharon arrived in the afternoon; a weekend of marathon talks and walks. We saw the map exhibit at the old musée on Île-Ste-Hélène. She says all she every wanted in life was to be normal, to not have people look at her, to blend in. But she has never lived a normal life and there's no point in pretending to, or trying to do so any more. She finds it very upsetting now when people utter platitudes. "How can people presume to know what I'm thinking," she says angrily. "My life has never followed a normal pattern so it's stupid to think it ever will."

This became a theme of the weekend: how some of us are unusual, don't fit in, have character and are the recipients of fated events. Others don't seem to have any of these characteristics and we reasoned that it was their fate to carry on the status quo. She calls them "empty-can people." As long as she trusts you and feels secure that nothing unpredictable will happen to her, she is the most accommodating person in the world to have come and stay. It didn't matter where we sat, kitchen or living room, we could always find something to talk about. We talked about fate, especially, Marsha and John's relationship. She is convinced that John is not the One and that Marsha is staying with him out of rebellion toward her parents, especially her father. She also thinks Marsha really wants marriage and children but is denying it out of the same rebellion or idealism.

From there we went on to idealism. Both Wheeze and I are much more idealistic about people than Sharon is. Sharon is pragmatic and will size someone up as to whether she feels they are worth knowing. There are stages and levels in her friendships, gateways, markers. She doesn't get swept up in great enthusiasms as Marsha and I do. If someone is friendly to me I don't care about anything else; I will simply melt. Sharon isn't like this. Sharon and I haven't been this intimate since our last days at Elrond, or her days living with Flo – before the Val-Al-Jim debacle. It is too bad it had to be a tragedy to bring us this close again.

We saw Woody Allen's latest, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, another clever charming film; wistful, yearning, witty, a comedy one step away from a broken heart. So many critics seem to express nothing but disappointment with all his new releases, constantly comparing them to *Annie Hall*. But *Purple Rose*, concerning the nature of fiction, creation, reality and illusion, is simply a wonderful movie for a writer or artist to see.

July 2

Fred and I found a secluded café near André Dionne's place; Café Santropol. It is covered in greenery and can hardly be seen from the street. Everything is green-tinted and tropical. It is also filled with intriguing old objects and the waiter wanders around aiming at the customers with a space gun. Fred and I drank papaya milkshakes and munched on huge salads that featured melons, pineapple, kiwi fruit. It was such an unexpected sanctuary on a hot day.

Walked down to the Spectrum. Back out into the oven, the streets bubbling in the sun. I've never seen so many tourists or events going on at once. A couple of years ago the city seemed so down at the heels. This is a great joyous rebirth. The jazz festival is going on and St-Denis is bursting with sound and colour. Saw Suzanne Vega at the Spectrum, which turned out to be a free concert! She and her band blended perfectly, the right balance between her voice and the instruments. You could hear the lyrics clearly, and her voice was powerful. She appeared on stage alone, sensitive yet also intense. She talked eloquently about Leonard Cohen. I love her lyrics.

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As BHCL turns ...

Ever since Howard returned from his New York trip and finished whatever he had to do for the Kitchener-Toronto clients, he has been charming. I had to dig up a book for him, entitled *Monopoly*. I was given the wrong date (off by a mile), but I managed to dig it up. He was pleased and actually wandered over to ask me what I would do if I found myself in the predicament of having to edit an editor. It seems that Bob's son, Gerry (yes, Gerry Jeffcott) has been sent in to edit Howard's report. Gerry is, of course, editing it to read just like one of his father's dreadful reports.

Howard's aggression is all verbal. He won't get involved in direct confrontations and doesn't stand his ground. The last thing one should do to Howard is come at him with a strong emotional statement. He will either back away or turn on you. Claire does this all the time. Some of the nastiest things I have ever heard him say are directed to her.

He has, to her face, called her and her family “a bunch of boors.” He also told her she would make a good union person because she never acts, only reacts. “Everything you do is a reaction.” While I was copying something, the machine broke down. Howard called from his office, “You have to use psychology on it.” Claire heard him speak, but not what he said, and misguidedly flew to my defence and shouted at him, “Stop calling her names and come out and do something.” Howard was nonplussed and responded, “The machine certainly won’t respond to illiteracy in the office.”

Howard and I occasionally end up together on the train. It’s so much more awkward than riding with Ken or John. I can’t think of a thing in the world to talk about with Howard. So I let him do the talking. He told me about Claire calling in to a radio contest and hearing her voice coming over the speakers. “And meanwhile the phones are all ringing, but at least it wasn’t one of her talk shows and she wasn’t calling in to express an *opinion*.” He actually helped her answer the contest question by shouting, “DW Griffith’s Birth of a Nation” on his way down to the store for a popsicle. On the train tonight he talked about sailing, the fine wine and good food he had on his Caribbean vacation then he complained about the trains, service industries and his rising insurance rates at BHCL. Then he offered me the *New York Times Supplement* to read “now that I have finished complaining.” I was happy to have that to read. Typically, we sat together-ish.

Kevin and I had a good talk about Jeffcott, how he can seem personable at first, but eventually he loses everybody by the condescending, paranoid way he speaks. Kevin said Jeffcott really doesn’t seem to have any hobbies and agreed with me when I said he was always serious and never really joked with people. Even his laughter, his loud guffaws are forced and nervous. The twin sons are clones of him, satyr-faced and solemn.

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On our way to the Croissant de lune, I thought I spotted Mary Maleki from Seneca on Sherbrooke Street. I asked Fred to stop the car and I sprinted two blocks to catch up. It was Mary and her husband, in Montréal for a long-weekend holiday.

Mary said she was enjoying her visit immensely and that Montréal is a beautiful city. We talked about our jobs. She's at the Legislative Library, finds the work boring and doesn't want to be there much longer than a year. It's a highly structured hierarchical system, and about as opposite to chaotic BHCL as can be. We talked excitedly about some of our classmates then parted. She was heading to the Picasso exhibit.

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Kevin and I went for lunch at Frisco. We had a good talk about university, English courses and favourite authors. I discovered many things about Kevin I didn't know. I always thought he was an electrical engineer but he majored in English at Sir George Williams (Concordia downtown) and quit two courses short of a degree. Sounds familiar! He also took a lot of philosophy courses. He's making arrangements to return to school this September and finish his degree. While we were walking back to the office he told me it was his dream to be a writer. He went up north, to James Bay to work. He kept an extensive journal on what what he did, thinking it would be good material. I asked him if he still kept a journal and he said only occasionally and that it had degenerated into little more than a record of some happenings, weather etc. He said he recently came to believe he just didn't have what it takes. There was a wistful look on his face. I suggested taking a creative writing class for one of his final credits at Concordia. It was such a good lunch. I always wondered why an electrical engineer knew so much about literature and the arts! I have a feeling that if Fred wasn't around, Kevin and I could definitely start something.

July 30

Kevin's birthday. He's 33 today. He liked the comment I made on his birthday card:

“First there was Bokononism

Then Ice-Nine

And now BHCL

And so it goes

(Have a good day)”

We gathered in the boardroom for the cake. Because everyone was together and because it was a birthday, Jeffcott was loud and obnoxious, looking like Beelzebub. He asked Kevin in a blatantly suggestive tone of voice, “Did you get what you wanted for your birthday?” “Why yes,” said Kevin. “I got a hat and some socks.” So adorable and tactful.

Then Bob made some jokes and commented about “mixed company.” I knew I was supposed to react, but just couldn’t be bothered. Tom and I grimaced at each other. And because it was a birthday, Howard lurked in the corner, glowering whenever anyone made a reference to birthdays or age – especially his own. I’m worried about Claire. There’s a storm brewing. She keep talking about how she wants the company to go under and for Jeffcott to pay like he’s never paid for anything in his life before. This is really strong, even for Claire. She’s become sharper, more hair-trigger and also more distant from myself and Mary. She doesn’t even have heart-to-hearts with John these days.

Aug. 1

John and I spent a good part of the day talking. He and Kevin went out for a beer last evening and waxed philosophical about women. I came up in the conversation. Apparently I rate highly with both of them and they think I have a lot of the positive feminine qualities. According to John, I am intelligent but warm and I have integrity. We both agreed we need warmth and depth in people, and some kind of spiritual awareness. Neither of us has much use for intelligence without humanity.

We also talked about how we both feel as if we were born in the wrong time period. John feels he would fit in better if he had been around 100 years earlier. He said his values are more those of an earlier generation; independence, stability, appreciation of nature, the pioneer spirit. He also said he has little in common with other people our age. Although I agree about not fitting into the “zeitgeist,” I am not sure what era would be better. As a woman I wouldn’t have made out too well a hundred years ago.

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Richard has bailed out of BHCL. None of us has been paid in a month and no one has complained louder than Howard, although it's John, Claire and I who most need the money. Richard quit because he needs a steady paycheque. Now Bob is talking about him behind his back, saying he wasn't good for anything except a few jokes and the resignation was mutual. I wasn't surprised as Kevin had told me a while ago that Richard and Bob weren't getting along.

Delivery of the new word processor has intensified the atmosphere around here. Bob paid for it out of his own pocket while the employees haven't seen a cheque for a month. Claire has taken it very personally, as she is wont to do. Howard was sharp and testy with her when they brought it in and she hadn't cleared her desk. "Why don't you just put it on her head?" Howard said to the delivery man in exasperation. Yet there is no lasting rancour between Claire and Howard – at least, not on Claire's side. Her real anger is directed entirely at Jeffcott. I think she just sees Howard as a sparring partner.

Aug. 6

Today I was laid off for six weeks, and John was let go permanently (Securitron was closed down by Joe). Claire quit in protest. Odd day from the start. Spent all morning talking with John and prophetically enough, he was telling me how his whole life has changed and he's starting right from the beginning. All he needed was a new job. We talked about reincarnation. He said he's never been around before; this is his first time. I think this must be the case for me as well, as I seem to feel underwater so much of the time.

It seems as if some people are brand new when they come into the world, and they fumble around without knowing what to do, who they are, or what to make of anything. Others seem so adept, knowing who they are, what their life goals are, how to speak, how to attract others, how to move in sync with everything around them.

After we finished with reincarnation, John and I talked about dreams. He dreams in colour. He said the subconscious has to be listened to. People who live only through their consciousness instinctively feel emptiness and so they try to fill themselves up with other things to compensate for not using their subconscious. Kevin came out and joined us. He had a dream that he was keeping Lauren Bacall in seclusion. The Howard popped out and told us about a dream he had of a “big gorgeous black woman.” John looked at me and rolled his eyes. He didn’t say it but I could hear him - “Isn’t this just the kind of person we were talking about?”

After this conversation I was called into Bob’s office and laid off. John was sympathetic and said, “I’m next.” He told everyone about the lay-off. Kevin came out and we talked about the job, how I felt I was just starting to hit my stride. We both felt it involves more than what appears on the surface, and that it really takes a year before you can master all the routines, admin procedures and any sort of subject knowledge. Kevin told me I had picked that up very quickly. Then he went in to tell Jeffcott that I was worried I might not be asked back, or that the position might be dropped. Jeffcott then called us both into his office to reassure me that this was only a temporary measure.

I feel lucky to have enough support from my co-workers to induce Jeffcott to make the proper amenities. He even thanked Kevin for drawing this to his attention. This is the kind of gesture Bob will make, though – the gesture that seems right and decent, but is really only for show, to make him look good. And after he feels cornered into making such a gesture, he will ignore you for the rest of the day. As soon as Kevin and I emerged from Jeffcott’s office Howard said, “It didn’t take him long to jerk off two people at once.” “Yes, and it was disgusting,” Kevin said, laughing and blushing.

When Claire found out she came, sat on my desk and put her arm around my shoulders. She, John and I talked direly about Gerry Jeffcott, who, oddly enough, was not let go although he is entirely superfluous to the company. Kevin confirmed that BHCL is at a critical point and in six weeks maybe no one will be left. Kevin goes on vacation next week and the only people left in the office will be Howard, Claire, Mary, Joe and presumably, Jeffcotts 1 and 2.

Thunderclouds building all day. Claire called Gerry Jeffcott a “big stupid jerk.” Gerry heard her, turned around and said, “What did you call me?” “I called you a big stupid jerk.” He really was stung. For once, a crack in that humourless pompous boss’s son facade. “I don’t have to take that shit,” he said. “Is that how you speak to people in an office?” For once he actually seemed to show some feeling, and his tone was more hurt than aggressive.

John received his notice from Joe later in the afternoon. It explains why Joe was skulking around all day not gladhanding anyone. Now that his job is gone, he is truly starting over again. What a year it has been for him. His birthday is April 28, which makes him my polar opposite, astrologically. Same birthday as Al Leake. I can see similarities in them. They both seem to need some sort of spiritual grounding. They tends to mythologize themselves. They both play guitar and listen to similar music. I thought of Al in John’s car when he played Genesis. Claire was ominously calm when John told her the news. There was a look of steely resolve on her face. A cold Claire is far more dangerous than a volcanic one. John’s departure will be very hard on her. The two of them have an affinity with each other.

Howard shook my hand and said, “See what happens when he (Jeffcott) talks to you? Nothing good ever comes out of that mouth!” And then he, being Howard (as Kevin put it) calculated how much stuff would arrive in six weeks and where they would keep it. However, he did send off a devastating email to Tom Wilson in Ottawa, informing him of the loss of two employees. I wish I could remember the actual words so I could record them, but I was surprised by his support. It had to do with keeping a lot of unproductive equipment and letting live employees go. It also said something about Bob putting conductors up his nose. It ended with the line, “What do you have to do around here to prove your worth?” Even John (not a Howard fan) was impressed by the message.

John and I took refuge in Kevin’s office and we all rabbled around aimlessly until Mary gave me my paycheque and UIC paperwork. Kevin said it was the kind of day you that something else could happen, like a bus crash or something. We clustered by the door until Howard and I left together for the train. Kevin said he’d keep me posted every week as to whether there was still a company etc. He was so sweet, coming to the door to see me off so I “couldn’t just sneak out.”

On the train with Howard. As usual, he did most of the talking. Fine by me, especially today. He talked about food and how much he has to exercise to stay trim, running and the mellowed-out feeling he gets from it. I have trouble imagining a mellow Howard, but there are more things on earth ... He talked about how it's an idiot's world and he wished he had been born an idiot so he could make a lot of money doing menial work.

He detailed all that he's done for BHCL, including pulling in a 100,000 government contract. "Other people in other companies get nice bonuses. *I* have to wonder when I'm going to get my salary. It's galling." I really wanted to ask why he was wasting his skills at BHCL, but didn't think that was a good idea. He talked about Jeffcott and his finances, how it's his support staff (namely Howard) who keeps him sitting in his office all day laughing. He also told me I wasn't severe enough with Bob and I shouldn't be too shy to see about getting a job at Bell – the library he had told me about earlier. I really appreciate his support and advice.

When I returned to the apartment I received a shock. Fred had called the office and Claire answered in a strange voice, and said she was gone too and that I would know why.

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Called Mary at work. I was very glad to speak to her for she was calm, reasonable and tactful. All she said was that yesterday was a bad day, Claire loses her cool and things were eventually smoothed over – somewhat. Claire is still there. Mary was on safer, firmer territory giving me directions to the UIC office.

**

Short rotund man walking up Berri, wearing only a pair of red shorts. He carried a wooden staff decorated with grass and flowers. He turned and raised the staff, crowning the cars as if conferring a Polynesian blessing, or curse, on them. A woman I often see on rue Sherbrooke wears scuba diving glasses.

**

Mary called to see how I was making out. Things at BHCL are much the same, but she said the exile shouldn't be too much longer. Kevin is away on a two-week vacation, very glad to get away. The stuff is piling up on my desk and Howard is starting to panic, griping about all that work down the drain. It was typically considerate of Mary to call and I do appreciate the update.

Aug. 23

Stephen, Lila and I met at Lila's. Stephen talked about his trip to England and the rediscovery of his family. He had spent many years running from them and enjoyed this reunion. That is the last thing I feel like doing. Maybe youth is the time for running, for creating a new life, and because it is new it is also fragile and there's an urgency to the process of breaking away. Maybe I'll feel more like integrating with my family when I'm older.

I felt that sense of urgency that I had to get away or my mother was going to take everything I had, that I felt belonged to me for herself, leaving me with no autonomous life. There is something vicarious, almost parasitical about the way my mother lives her life and I was too young to understand what was happening. No matter what I do or accomplish she will turn it into her story. She is always telling people she ordered me to marry Fred; the truth is she had never even heard of Fred until our engagement. These untrue narratives have been going on for a long time, and it sometimes feels that I don't even really exist. The things I do or like are generally way too pie-in-the-sky for her, and then she usually mocks them. She wrote a letter addressed to Fred that said, "More classes? Why does she want to do that for?"

Anyway, Stephen discovered some interesting stories about his background. His parents were circus performers who met in England! His father, because he was Italian and an enemy to the country, was a refugee and had to be hidden. His background sounds like a novel, but Stephen has the bearing, cultivation and tenacity to have that background.

After reading our new work, we discussed courses and registration etc. This was one of the first times I glimpsed loneliness or melancholy in Stephen, not his usual self-contained demeanor nor the Jungian “Sturm und drang” that appears in his stories. He said he wanted to take as many night courses as he could so he wouldn’t have to spend time alone in his apartment to brood and be very depressed. If his story “Jigsaw” was based in truth, he recently broke up with his wife and it must have been traumatic. We left Lila’s and I walked him to the bus stop. When I left him I still felt that loneliness welling around him, maybe more an “alone-ness” than loneliness. A vulnerability I had not sensed before.

Week of Aug. 26

To Toronto to spend a week with Sharon. We eventually met up at Union Station after both of us walked into the wrong exit. We talked about Ernie’s family, Marsha and John, my work – our usual subjects. When Sharon spent the week at the cottage with Marsha she learned for the first time that Marsha’s father had actually beaten the children when they were younger. Marsha does recognize the same kind of anger in herself. Sharon and I lay in her bed talking. An antique Niagara Falls lamp Ernie bought casts a beautiful moving light on the walls and ceilings. Sharon told me how Ernie’s mother “tried to steal her grave.” It must have been a huge change for Ernie, meeting and living with Sharon. He seems to be the only one in his family who even went out into the world. Sometimes I can’t help but wonder if he went as far as he could go, he couldn’t turn back to his creepy family but there was no future for him in the world?

Sharon met one of Ernie’s best friends who told her she was remarkable for being able to see that the “accident” was meant to be, that there is a higher power or meaning in life. Allen Musgrave cannot see this. According to Sharon, the entire Musgrave family continues to recount every detail of the death. Allen says it is the work of a malicious god that has it in for them.

Another blow. Jan McLean, who sang at Sharon's wedding and who made the evening so special died of cancer while Sharon was at the cottage with Marsha. Sharon said that when she was young she always felt that God looked down at her and thought she was special because everything that happens to her is a lesson. It really does seem that way. Of course I quite often imagine what if it were Fred and not Ernie. Ever since Ernie was killed, life has seemed so much more fragile; anything can happen at any time and take it all away.

Sharon and I went to the CNE with Linda Yee, her sister and two cousins. We wandered through buildings looking at things with the indomitable Yees for eight hours. Linda is very practical, and has just bought a house in Toronto. Fred and I can't even afford to rent in Toronto.

Sharon bought some more plants. She needs to care for things right now. She is becoming a real compendium of knowledge about birds, wildlife, local history and customs. She is also becoming extremely resourceful and tenacious in tracking down information. One of her endearing qualities is that she is in no way snobbish about her knowledge and imparts it with great generosity.

**

Sharon's insurance agent came over and I called Susan Chapman. We talked for a long time. She is as humorous and self-deprecating as she was at school. We talked about work of course, and joked about all the stories we would have for Karen Cullen's Management course. I even confessed to going against the Alchuk canon and "getting involved" with my co-workers. The horror! The situation is better with her sons. One is back from the Katimavik program, much more mature. We joked about cataloguing (my bete noir) and reference (her pet peeve).

Faye Zeidman is working in the Toronto Public Library system, cataloguing in Yiddish, Hebrew and other languages she may know. Ellen Ryan used to be outraged at Faye's "nosiness," very upset when Faye asked how much money she was making as the Seneca lab technician. I like Faye and was intrigued by her background, educational and otherwise. The only thing I ever heard her say was, "In another life I taught Hebrew."

I enjoyed working with her at school, the way we traded information and how she never forgot a favour. Often she would pinch my cheek and call me “bubeleh,” or tell me, “You’re funny. Not smart – but funny.” The talk with Susan brought back a lot of feelings about Seneca, especially how much I truly like most of these people.

Called Nancy Dewdney. She is working at Imperial Oil now and enjoying it. Said she pinches herself to make sure she is really in such a great place. She is so pragmatic in her career actions. Professionally, she seems to have it all mapped out. Nancy’s a great lover of strategy. She is taking French courses with her husband, Dave. He is taking part-time courses at U of T. Seems he is strongly influenced by her love of education and self-improvement. It was good to talk to her, but after we talked about work and reminisced about school, I felt we just slipped away from each other. We come so close to being great friends, but we never quite close enough.

**

Met Joanne Montemurro at the Metro Reference Library where she works. She is still surrounded by weirdoes at work and doesn’t think she will ever get away from them. “The horror show continues.” She looked lovely. Her hair is now shoulder-length and she was dressed beautifully. She has lost a lot of weight and I’m a bit worried about her. She had anorexia when she was younger. Joanne is warm and affectionate and a sensitive soul. I get the feeling life often seems dirty or disgusting to her. Her sense of humour is sharp and intelligent, much like Sir Jefforie’s. We turned into a le Chateau so she could pick up a present for a cousin’s birthday. Felt like I had stepped into world of mirrors, and I would step down and find myself in other rooms that looked just like the room I had come from, only with tiny mind-messing differences, such as changes in the clothing on the racks. I lost sight of Joanne and it was as if she had stepped into one of those mirrors and disappeared. I always worry about Joanne disappearing.

We went to Toby’s, had coffee and something to eat. Joanne had trouble finishing her salad. It was a warm atmosphere where we could loudly reminisce and laugh. She said that when Kim, Ellen and Mika went to England, Mika wanted to go to pubs, Ellen wanted to go to museums, Kim wanted to go shopping. This made me smile. So typical!

Johanne Cunliffe got married to Andy and invited Nancy and Ellen. Blunt and forthright as she appears, I always got the idea that she's quite conventional and needy in relationships. Apparently, she told everyone at Kim's she would never consider marrying anyone without a university degree. Joanne M then said I wasn't like anyone else she knew with a degree, that I was the humblest person she knew and I had so much potential. Kind words - but my degree isn't exactly worth bragging about! I finally got the piece of paper, that's all I can truthfully say about it. Joanne and I parted at the subway, promising to write and call each other. Her kindness and humour are worth more to me than any degree.

**

Sharon's friend Monica came over, and we sat around the kitchen table talking. We started talking about family background, how you sometimes find the unexpected. Sharon's father is a Mormon. I never knew that! Monica is German with Swiss relatives and a "mysterious Jewish grandmother."

I don't know anything about my background – seems like there is nothing interesting to know. My mother's family, the Johnsons, seem to be completely typical British colonists. We then started talking about dreams. I mentioned the dream that I was commuting to Seneca in a life preserver and the highway was water. All kinds of people in business suits and briefcases were passing me. One time I dreamed I was floating on a "Field and Stream" magazine. I have recurring dreams of floating in water, very often the same scene. The sky is overcast, narrow winding dirt road, forest of pine trees on the other side.

Sharon mentioned she has nightmares of snow plows running into the building, crashing through the walls. She used to get up in the night and Ernie would bring her back to bed. Shortly before Ernie was killed, Sharon had a recurring series of dreams in which she lost her wedding rings. She hasn't dreamed that since Ernie died. Monica has recurring dreams that she is working on an assembly line with a certain type of paper and it all bunches up and crumples on her. She will dream this two or three times a night.

**

Had intended to cook a special dinner for Sharon, but by the time I returned she was already back from work. We went to see the movie, *Cocoon*. Fred came in at eleven, earlier than expected. Sharon and I were both lying on the bed reading sections of the newspaper with glasses of wine, Twinkie out and about, “lobing” me. And then Fred appeared. It was just like Elrond, seeing him come through the door.

Sept. 7

Left the Picasso exhibition feeling as if I would explode with shapes, colours, sounds. Went to the Croissant de lune to decompress. Picasso could create mood, atmosphere, state-of-being just by his use of colour; ochres, dark brown, dove-grey, shades of blue-green. The anger of some of his shades of green, especially in the “Fatherhood” painting, use of mustard yellow. Some of the grey and white paintings remind me of long ago memory fragments of old black and white movies or TV shows.

Looking closer, I could see some of the grey and white brushstrokes are actually the colour of faint dried blood. He rips away the surfaces and you can see the rim, the edge, the membrane of what has been torn apart. The subject is shown inside out, the very mechanism, blood, guts, pulse of life exposed. In one portrait there is a face and also a shadow face right behind it, like two faces of the moon. Another made me think of an x-ray, the eye burning through the skin and bone of the skull until it is embedded in the darkness and colour swirled and streaked inside.

It's not the portrayal of one subject, it is the reality, the entire world of the subject. Everything, including light and dark is drawn into it as if his paintings are magnetic squares. In one of the paintings of a couple, you saw the act of sex, the mixing of male and female, the holes you drop through, the seeds, heads that resemble tube-flowers. Every feeling, every soft place, every lost moment, every feeling of vertigo or confusion is exposed, connected, becoming shapes, colours. All the dualities and contradictions, splits in personality, ambiguities are given shape, colour, form are represented literally, juxtaposed and enjambed.

Blocky figures, pictographs, humans turned into machines. “Crushed by the wheels of industry.” Agony, agitation, contortion. He tears everything apart and reassembles it. Hieratic poses. Faces broken into planes, changing from moment to moment, depending on whose eyes are seeing the spectacle. Calm surfaces exploded, shapes and colours burst, almost cartoon-like. One almost expects a Batmanlike BIFF, POW or ZOWIE to appear. Picasso gives form to the inexpressible, the world behind the eyes.

Sept. 9

Phoned BHCL and spoke with Claire for a little while. When I asked her what was going on she said, “Nothing as usual.” I asked to speak to Kevin and it was good to hear his voice. Things are still unsettled. Everyone finally got paid – but only as of last Friday. The company is on a cliff-edge in terms of whether it can keep going. The stuff on my desk is sky-high – and there was a robbery.

When Kevin came back from his vacation he discovered 12,000 worth of equipment was stolen, including one of the cameras. They called the police. Kevin said he thought of me when all this was going on, how I would have enjoyed the absurdity. I asked if I could use his as a reference and he said, “Sure!” The good news was that he had a great time on his vacation to Maine and Quebec City.

Sept. 12 weekend

Marsha and John came for a visit. Great to see them as usual. This time we saw more of John than usual and I’ve really come to appreciate his quiet humour, tact, and the way he takes everything in. He is very observant and even better, doesn’t pass harsh judgments on what he sees. Marsha and I spent most of the evening talking about Sharon. She had spent an intensive week with Sharon at the cottage, and Marsha had a lot to talk about, a lot of emotional cleansing to do. One thing I can’t get over is how different Marsha’s description of the week was from Sharon’s. The two of them present two, opposite, sides to me.

According to Marsha, it had been a crucial week. Sharon had been “cresting,” at some sort of crossroads. She talked and talked the whole week, fluctuating back and forth between bitterness and resignation, fatalism and anger at her mother-in-law. Marsha also told me that Sharon had talked constantly about not having enough money and how she wouldn’t buy things she really liked for that reason. The Sharon I saw talked about spiritual strength and about a god who thought she was special. We went shopping in Toronto and she bought many things, including plants to take care of. She lent money to me without my having to ask. I thought she had been freer with her money than usual! This split is so intriguing to me. We talked about Sharon until John suggested we let Sharon rest. Sharon and John are not a mutual fan club.

Marsha talks so much about Sharon because she cares. Sharon is an intense personality who can be overwhelming - much more the case for Marsha than for me. Marsha so often seems to see a different darker side to Sharon than I do, or ever have. I do wonder why this is. Is it because I am not as close to Sharon’s heart as Marsha and I just receive the “cleaned-up” version? Maybe it’s just timing.

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Headed to Vermont in two cars. The convoy worked out well. John followed Fred, their movements well coordinated, smooth passage all the way. The campsite was in the woods, surprisingly quiet and private. John and Fred made a fire, John orderly and efficient in gathering twigs and breaking them to size. Fred climbed a tree and looked like a giant sloth. Eventually Marsha and I had our way and we went into Burlington. Started off at Finbar’s, a rowdy student bar, then a great dinner at “What’s Your Beef.”

The waitress was impressive, friendly and efficient. Marsha, in particular, was attracted to her, because she was a strong character, easy to respect. Many people tend to overlook this aspect of Marsha. They don’t want to see the discipline, respect for strength, the austerity or the Saturn that is conjunct the fiery sun. After dinner, we went to a bar named Sheik. The singer was good and Marsha was enthusiastic, sparkling. She invited him to come play in Kingston.

After we left the Sheik, Marsha and I both realized we had too much to drink. Marsha was sick on the way back to the campsite. I walked around the site three times, perfectly lucid and out of control. I lay on the ground and writhed. Next morning I pleaded with Fred. “No, I didn’t writhe. Please don’t tell me that I writhed.” Fred was merciless. Marsha was extremely apologetic and ashamed of what she considered weakness on her part. I tried to tell her I was the last person in the world to accuse her of behaving badly. “I don’t think Bat was feeling any pain,” said John. On the way back to Montréal, Marsha and I were very drowsy but we did manage to hike part of the trail at Smuggler’s Notch.

Sept. 14

Saw Marsha and John off, then I went to an astrology lecture. Jeff Green spoke on Neptune. Susan Kelly, dressed in Neptunian shades of blue and purple, sat beside me, put her arm around me and said, “Where were you for Pluto? I kept thinking Lesley should be here.” Friendly greeting from André. Warm greeting from Lorissa, the ASM treasurer. She once called me “Miss Scorpio” and said she could tell right off I was a Scorpio because of my bone structure.

The lecture was excellent. Jeff Green has a kind face, no arrogance or aggression whatsoever in his eyes, unlike some of the speakers I’ve heard. Neptune’s ultimate role is of a transcendent or timeless nature, dissolving barriers that prevent a direct unification and relationship with the source of all things. According to Green, faith is the antidote, faith is meant to circumvent doubt. Whatever is connected with Neptune is subject to the transcendent.

He went through Neptune in the houses and almost dissolved himself before he reached the 12th House. I always find it so interesting how the mood of the audience takes on the qualities of whatever planet is featured in a lecture. People are so easily influenced!

Sharon has Neptune in the 6th House, and Jeff lingered a bit on that position. He talked about how these people drew crises into their lives in order to deal with reality. Then I thought of her Sun in the 10th squared Saturn, and how you could come to the same theme whichever planet or aspect you picked out in her chart. I think astrology is a very functional symbolic system, with a kind of redundancy that makes it work. The chart is such a synthesis with an amazing structural order, consistency and recurrence of themes through the different aspects and placements of planets. A bit like art or literature.

Sept. 17

Lila, Steven Frank, Ira Roth and I are in the same Creative Writing section. So far, less than inspiring. No feeling of light, of inspiration. A lot of older men in the class. General sense of intellectual arrogance, smugness, pomposity. There is also a man around my age who doesn't believe in any kind of revision because he has reached the 426 level.

Stephen managed to find his way into the same class with Sally, Michèle and Kirsten. On the bus with Lila. I expressed some of my doubts and said I couldn't stop comparing the instructor, Scott Lawrence, with Colin. Lila said she knew what I meant only too well and said, "It was a love affair!"

Sept. 26

Astrology lecture, this time held in a prim little speakers' room at the Ramada Inn, complete with triangular white napkins and overturned drinking glasses. Met Susan Kelly in the lobby and we went on a quest for coffee. Steve Eardley from Vermont spoke on Moon phases, which again seem like symbolic short cuts, a way of directly penetrating to someone's essence. I do love the symbols though, their rich language. Astrology is this closed system, self-generating, full of redundancy. I appreciate it most as a highly effective and symbolic system. So wish I could express this better. Met Mary Rose Arian (who is a Gemini, not an Aries). We took the Metro together. She is talkative but comfortable to be around. I missed my stop and walked home, into the wind, from Villa Maria station. I do tend to lose track of myself after astrology lectures.

Sept. 29

Another writing class. After Colin, Scott Lawrence definitely seems like the “rebound prof.” He’s a perfectly fine instructor – but he’s not Colin. And, except for the four of us from Colin’s class, the class is dreadful. We have a God, an almighty patriarchal God of Writing, middleaged man with a great big pasty face, fishy eyes. He dresses in the same flannel shirt every week and utters grand pronouncements instead of helpful critiques. “You’re not supposed to ... A story must have ...” I wish God would put some of that wind into parting the Red Sea or leading the Israelites out of Egypt or something. Even if one could completely ignore God, the criticism is contentious, people going for the jugular instead of lifting each other up. Jeff Kahan writes a lot of bar scenes, “I’ve *been* there before. Yep, another junior Bukowski who has seen every depravity, experienced all that humanity has to offer.

Ira gave Lila and me a ride home. Ira has been terribly busy, rushing from place to place, falling behind and feeling out of control. Her son is very orthodox and she had to keep all the high holidays. They made a Sukkot booth by their garage and Ira had to serve all the food out in this structure. She fell and hurt herself, spilling the food on her nicest clothes. She says she wouldn’t follow all those traditions on her own. “Such a tragedy we didn’t have more children, my husband says. But I say, this is enough. This is more than enough.” Ira is also an artist and she has a painting showing in a gallery near Atwater. I must stop in and see it. She showed us photos of her paintings and they looked beautiful - radiant creations.

Oct. 11 weekend

Kingston for Thanksgiving weekend. Marsha seemed to have every moment planned, no gaps in activity. Went immediately to Eileen and Sophia’s for a Chinese food feast. John ordered pizza and sat by himself in the corner. Deb was there, sharp and snappy as usual. Sophia in good health, talking about the good old days in England and how much she misses the sea. Eileen seems lonely, though. She spends so much time caring for Sophia and giving to others I don’t think she takes any time for her own needs.

She misses her sons terribly. The sadness in her eyes was even more apparent this time than on our last visit to Kingston. There are long periods when there is a pause in the conversation, when she is far away from the people clustered around her. Marsha says she is thinking of writing one of the sons and letting him know how much his mother misses them. Eileen is always especially solicitous toward John and Fred, perhaps because they remind her of her sons.

The food was delicious. Marsha served as moderator, ice-breaker, errand-runner, doing almost as much as Eileen herself to make everyone feel comfortable. Eileen told stories about some of the objects in the room, the kite from the East Indies, the Aztec calendar. Her apartment is filled with furniture and decor from hundreds of different countries, markers of a rich full life. Deb, too, has a son who lives far away, in the Yukon. She's planning to visit him at Christmas. After dinner, at Deb's prompting, we gathered around the TV and guffawed over *Dallas*.

Sharon arrived Saturday afternoon, after a day of train mishaps. The first one was delayed an hour, the second one cancelled. Marsha, John and the two of us finally went to The Tea Cosy, and ended up being late to the station to pick her up. She was on the verge of taking her suitcase and walking to the apartment. Any kind of disruption deeply shakes Sharon, and it has been worse since Ernie's death.

We also found out that she has been writing letters to John Fortin, a friend of Marsha and John's. When John Fortin came to dinner, he and Sharon sat together and spoke intimately. We had another feast. Excellent food, wine and good talk. Marsha is turning their place into a "Homesick Restaurant."

Drove Sharon to Prescott so she could have Thanksgiving dinner with her family. We stopped in for tea and were invited to stay. We spent the afternoon sitting around the table talking, and I was struck by how much Sharon's family reminds me of my own. Betty often sounds like my mother. Something she said even got under my skin like my mother. The smell was the same. Mr Thorpe ministered to the turkey, Sharon, Gail, Marc and the two of us continued an animated conversation in the living room. Another feast and finally Montréal again.

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Saw *Agnes of God*, a Norman Jewison film. A riveting mix of deep emotion and suspense. It reminded me of Debussy's "Sonate pour violon et cello" with the duality, the anguished separation between the earthly and the spiritual. The weeping of the violin trying to reach the heights, the low tones of the cello keeping the music connected to earth. The movie had the same kind of dialogue between earth and spirit, the same separation, the ecstasy of pure devotion and the shackles of ignorance and superstition. Agnes's achingly beautiful singing – the blood on her hands. The beauty of her vision of angels creating babies from pure spirit, but the horror of the real events surrounding her pregnancy caused by ignorance and fear. The revelation of child abuse. How to bring reason without destroying the wild spirit? One of the movie's most haunting scenes occurred when Agnes pulls herself away from the doctor and cries, "You're trying to take God away from me!"

**

Nothing new at BHCL. Kevin trying to get a definite answer out of Jeffcott but I am assuming it's over, this part of my life has ended. Joe is gone as they couldn't afford his salary. Claire is also gone for good now too. Apparently after the big row on the day I left, Claire made a ninety day agreement with Joe to learn some word processing so she could find another job. The ninety days are up, Claire is gone and Mary is all alone. According to Kevin, Bob had Gerry call me about word processing something for him. I'm glad I wasn't around to take that call.

**

Went to class and was pleasantly surprised by the comments on "Jerusalem." The criticisms were also more helpful than usual. Scott Lawrence read the story carefully and said, "You have a real talent for making your story positively teem with life. It is a joy to behold; the world you create is fertile, in constant movement." Scott is much more down-to-earth than Colin. He doesn't have the same energy or inspiration. He also doesn't have the same ability to link images together, to make those breath-taking intuitive leaps. Even God was merciful. He actually defended the story. Who can understand the workings of God?

Oct. 24

Back to BHCL for a few days. The office looked deserted when I walked in. The air conditioner has been removed and the window open. Mary came out from the centre of the labyrinth and kissed me on the cheek. The place seemed to come alive again, as if that was the kiss to break a spell. “What is this,” said Howard from his office. “Nostalgia day?”

Kevin invited me for lunch so I ended up at Velo’s with Kevin and Howard. Howard had the two of us in stitches with his wit. He said, “This is what it’s like having lunch with Regulatory Affairs – or Irregulatory Affairs, since it is BHCL.” Now that everyone is gone, he and Kevin seem even more like an old vaudeville pair. Kevin is straight man but often quietly coming in with the sharpest, most amusing comments. Howard asked how the “Flycatcher” was and suggested that since Fred has a technical mind he could build a “flycatcher contraption” on top of his car to blow flies in front of the car so Fred could catch them.

Later, good talk about movies with Kevin. Mentioned I wanted to see *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Howard then cut in and said he wanted to see that one and the Yugoslavian one. I mentioned how no one ever wants to see the movies I want to see. Howard actually said, “Yeah, me too.” Then I told Kevin about going to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with friends and having them cheer and jump up from their seats while I started falling asleep from boredom. Howard said, “Oh, so you went with a bunch of nerds, did you.” Some people actually disliked that movies and are starting to come out of the closet. Kevin agreed that “Raiders didn’t have any more redeeming qualities than an episode of the Road Runner.”

Mary seems distant, more remote, isolated as she is outside Bob’s office. No more Claire to eat lunch or take breaks with. No feeling of nostalgia hearing Jeffcott ranting from his office with the door open. Kevin and I looked at each other, laughing, while Howard made rude gestures. It seems as if we’ve become a threesome and that I’m in on the jokes now.

Walked out to the train with Howard. He actually waited for me and walked with me with his umbrella. He can be quite incisive in his analyses. Earlier I had heard him mention Claire’s name and thought I overheard him telling Kevin she was in an institute, so I asked what institute. He laughed and said, “When talking about Claire that’s a reasonable assumption.”

He talked about how she wouldn't learn the word processing "although she didn't have anything else to do, and all she ever did was whine for me to rescue her." He said she wouldn't read the manual or make any attempt to experiment. Then he said she had an aversion to doing any kind of work. I have a feeling her aversion wasn't to work – I think it was to reading. I remember how she wouldn't keep telephone numbers, wouldn't make up any kind of index. She once told me she admired me for being able to do that kind of work. Now I am pretty sure she was afraid of books and avoided reading or writing.

Claire is sharper and a better judge of people than Howard credits her. She was also his staunch defender when he wasn't around. Howard also doesn't realize how much she loathed that word processor. To her it symbolized Jeffcott's callousness toward his employees. She associated it with him and stoked a personal vendetta against it. Now of course, Jeffcott cuts her up in front of everyone, constantly making cracks about her personality and incompetence.

On the train, Howard told me that Bob still talks about the office as if Joe, Richard, Roger and I are still there. A man came up to me, pointed at Howard and said, "Is this man bothering you?" I looked aghast until I realized the man knew Howard and it was a joke. Everyone on the train seems to know Howard and calls him by name. He is both an elitist and a populist.

Oct. 25

Howard seems to be in a good mood these days, holding court over Kevin. When I walked in he said playfully, "Is this Prince walking past me in purple?" Kevin was smiling. "No it's only Lesley." At one point Jeffcott came in and greeted me nicely by name. I mentioned it to Kevin and said I almost fell off my chair. "I heard that," he said. "I almost fell off my chair as well."

Variety of topics on the train with Howard today. We talked about word processing for a while, humidifiers, dry skin. At one point I looked out the window and saw a double rainbow, the clearest rainbow I've seen since Ernie's death. Howard listed the colours he could see in spite of the tinted windows. He talked about light, saying how much he liked it when it was overcast and the sun would break through, "how dramatic it all was somehow." Then he talked about evening light and how it takes on this yellow or gold colour, and we both agreed it is the nicest light of the day. He wanted to know about the book I had pulled out to read, *The Fragmented Life of Don Jacobo Lerner* by Isaac Goldemberg. I had just finished the last pages and I told him it was sad, especially in the tinted light of the train with the darkness starting to grow outside.

The conversation then returned to the office, to Jeffcott, who doesn't have a budget made up for any of the departments and can't bear to deal with any papers put on his desk. According to Howard, Jeffcott creates his own misfortune yet cannot face the reality of his situations. He is probably convinced that all these people still work there and that the office does have the largest regulatory affairs library in the private sector. In all those piles of brochures, etc. to be filed, there were all kinds of notes from him, written after I was laid off. Who did he think was going to read those notes? Or maybe he didn't realize I wasn't there?

The train conductor came by, one who did not know Howard. Howard showed his pass and the conductor, a brittle little bureaucrat lit into Howard and accused him of trying to steal from the train company because his photo was on the back of the card. Howard answered him and before I had really comprehended that this was not just another joke and the serious face would crack into a smile, the conductor threatened to contact the police – and if Howard was going into Montréal he would have people waiting for him "who know what to do with wise guys like you." The man went stomping off and Howard called after him, "Why don't you do that then? Why don't you do it now it that's what it takes to give yourself some feeling of satisfaction. The man was apoplectic and almost came rushing back. Finally the train reached Vendome Station.

Oct. 26

Robert Hand astrology lecture. Right after the lecture, Fred and I made a getaway to Vermont, one of my favourite places in the world. The light is so luminous. Reds, golds and remaining greens smouldered under a grey sky. Everywhere, Indian corn on the doors, jack-o'lanterns like Japanese masks, effigies dressed up as farmers. Harvest, the approach of winter. It always seems more intensely autumn here than anywhere else. Entered the mountains in sunset, moving from light into darkness. Slept at Mt Mansfield on the mattress in the back of the car. Made our way up the mountain.

First stage, the long gravel road and ruff of trees, then the narrow path through the woods with wooden bridges, cut through by streams. It became rocky, bushes stunted with tiny needles. Rocks swirling with colour, deep mineral shades of green, grey. The rocks in golden light made me feel as if we were in ancient Israel, surrounded by ancient shrines to YHWH. We raised our boxes of Five Alive, blew an imaginary shofar and toasted, "Next year in Jerusalem."

Oct. 29

Card from the Professor. I found a Halloween card that reminded me of her and sent it, although I haven't heard from her in ages. Seems as if the same thing happened to her, for our cards crossed in the mail. Our messages were much the same too. Kim called. She is now working with Ellen Ryan at Consumer's Distributing, but I wonder how long that will last. She is hurt that others don't stay in touch and feels she is the only one who makes an effort to get together. Mentioned that Lynn has her own apartment, which she is sharing with Brad.

Card from Susan Chapman, who is now using her maiden name, Lundy. "... I'm not up to much once I get home at night. I seem to go around in a chronic state of exhaustion, which is shared, I understand, by many other working women! It's like that Cathy mug that shows her with a mop and a briefcase and says, 'I have the worst of both worlds.' Oh well, I spent 16 years wanting to get out of the kitchen so now I can darn well enjoy it, even if it kills me ..." Wow. This is so articulate – and important. Major change is painful, brutal even, the story of so many women now.

Oct. 31

Soon as I entered the BHCL office, Howard came out and said, “Have you heard about the new type of AIDS? It’s called hearing AIDS. It’s what you get when you listen to assholes.” He repeated that joke to Jeffcott, very pointedly. Jeffcott made some remark showing he didn’t realize it was aimed at him. Howard, Kevin and I all started laughing. Near the end of the day while I was discussing the library with Kevin, Gerry Jeffcott came in looking for synonyms for “a congenial, productive working environment.”

Howard told me that Gerry steadfastly goes from day to day writing and rewriting reports for his father, having to come up with the same words his father would use. Howard lobbed some hilarious buzzwords at him, my favourites being “efficacious business conduciveness” and “prolific office fecundity.” Gerry seemed bemused by all of this, while Kevin and I openly laughed. The day ended with Kevin and I lingering at the door talking about the eerie square of blue light above the back entrance. Howard waited for me and we walked to the train together.

He found out who that train conductor is. He is well-known among train employees as someone who blows up for little reason. He is called “the Crazy Polack” and usually does the freight runs. Howard said he’s relieved to know he has this reputation in case there’s another incident. He talked about his and Kevin’s trip to Ottawa, about how Tom doesn’t get any specific instructions from Bob either. He talked about his and Kevin’s ride back on the train and the couple Kevin described as being straight from Ayn Rand, they were that shallow and opportunistic. I loved hearing Kevin’s voice and beliefs coming from Howard’s mouth. Seems like a nice reversal. Just because someone is quieter doesn’t mean they lack influence or integrity.

Howard said he was going to his grandmother’s to recopy figures from one small notebook to another. “Every so often she gets it into her head that she needs a new books and goes on a shopping expedition for one. Always the same kind of notebook she brings back. Then I suppose I’ll eat dinner there. She cooks a decent kugel but mostly tasteless soup and fish without an interesting sauce.”

I told him about my grandmother, how she lived in a small house on our property and whenever she wanted one of us to come over she would call my father and tell him she heard prowlers around the house. Then someone – almost always Boot – would go over there for dinner. Howard suggested opening the door, shouting out into the night then running off - “maybe she’d get the message.” I said it was more likely she’d get scared by her own stories and move into our house. As usual we parted at Vendome Station. I will miss this surrealistic train talk with Howard.

**

Fred now working at Astral Photo. He works with Simon and Ya'acov, Simon who worries all the time and the very orthodox Ya'acov, who also has a irreverent sense of humour. Through the course of one evening, Fred learned about a Reform rabbi who is giving lessons to a young couple and presiding over the man's conversion, the definitive books used in such matters (Orthodox bias, of course), the difference between seven and nine-branch menorahs. Ya'acov is extremely forthcoming, loves to answer questions and educate people about his religion. He and Simon had a heated discussion on whether or not blood is taken during circumcision. Not every day one starts a new job and hears arguments over circumcision or what constitutes kosher.

**

A funny card from Joanne Montemurro and a long letter from Fred Merritt describing his tutoring adventures at Seneca College. Also received a *Writing* magazine in the mail from Colin. It is really stimulating. There is a piece by Daphne Marlatt that reminds me a little of Lyn Hejinians's *My Life*. This work excites me in a way I haven't felt since Colin left.

**

Talk with Lila about our current class and she feels it has a very masculine tone. She wants me to stick with it and I told her quite honestly that it was really her and Ira who were keeping me there. Scott is thorough, I can learn from him and I have to stop comparing him to Colin. They are completely different people.

After class, Lila and I were given a ride by Ira's husband who told her she was seven minutes late. They must drive each other insane. He is small, bearded, hunched up at the wheel, speaks in a sing-songy accent. His driving made me nervous as he really didn't seem to be in control of the car. Ira doesn't drive any less erratically, but she seems indestructible – a little like Kim Jackson.

**

Fruitful supplement to the ASM newsletter. Party on 10 December for members, Mary Rose Arian wants to form some sort of discussion group and Deena Grier is looking for someone to set up a tape library. I called Mary Rose about the group and she was a talkative as I remember from the lecture. She remembered me and we had a good talk about astrology. After that I called Deena and she was warm and very enthusiastic about my volunteering to run a tape centre. It will be interesting and something for my resumé as BHCL is over.

Nov. 9

Fred working at Astral, or more likely, exchanging jokes with Ya'acov. I went to a reading held by Concordia faculty members. On my way to the Hall building, raining slightly, red-yellow-green streetlights streaming into the dark running streets, the buildings softer, darker than usual. Nine readers including Scott Lawrence. I was less than impressed. Some of the pieces were competent enough but seemed banal or just lifeless. Karen Evoy's story went on and on. After a while I started to wonder why she even wrote the story or if she herself cared about those characters. Henry Beisel's poetry had some striking imagery about the Ice Age.

I also like Scott's story about the mulberry tree. It was compassionate, down to earth and slyly humorous with a little touch of magic at the end. At least his everyday world is capable of turning into something magical or mysterious. Someone read yet another short story about skiing. Most of the audience chuckled at well set-up jokes, but I didn't find it interesting. Part of me is reassured. If they can do it, so can I. But if these are the successful writers, I have no interest in doing the work to become one.

**

Interesting book by Sue Roe – *Estella: Her Expectations*. An antidote to the Concordia reading. This book is beautifully written, very visual, made up of images, light, shadow, colour. Languages of painting, music, dance. Subliminal languages of desire, expectation, which are used as the basis of advertising. The network of images is the structure of the book. It is also an exploration of the many faces of woman, from the smartly dressed woman of business to the ancient decaying bridal gown, outdated archetypes rotting in place. The book is an internal voyage through the archetypes of society and art, the assumptions of many identities. Myriads of layers, selves.

Nov. 12

Meeting at Deena's. A fluffy snow coming down without beginning or end, and I was feeling both alone and festive walking along Sherbrooke. This street looks even more elegant in snow. Deena's apartment, a comfortable mixture of the old and new. Susan, André, Lorissa and Lise were there. André's calmness and generosity a real stabilizer. He gives so much of his time and energy. He is still teaching classes at the Y but he has only seven students and the Y doubled their prices. He must be losing money and I think he is worried about his situation.

Susan started a job as executive secretary for a whiskey importation company and she was high-strung and sharp-tongued. I saw it coming when she spoke out during the discussion of fundraising. I think what was really upsetting her is that her ideas are not given enough credit or are not taken up. For some reason, a lot of flare-ups were caused by Lorissa, through no fault of Lorissa's, just chemistry between the two of them. I've seen them in heated conversations at lectures and it's Susan who seems to flare up at Lorissa. It is a good group though. Everyone carried on, neither ignoring nor making a fuss and embarrassing Susan. At the end of the meeting, Deena and Susan embraced and Deena told her to climb into bed with her cat and get some sleep.

When I got home, Mary Rose Arian called. She has another person for a discussion group. He's an RCMP insurance fraud investigator and says we can use the lounge at RCMP headquarters for meetings. This is going to be interesting!

**

Went to see the movie *Jacob the Liar* at the Cinéma Québécoise as part of the Jewish Film Festival. Although I had read the book and knew how it would end, the movie still devastated me. All I wanted to do at the end was sob, sob for a thousand years. I didn't know how I would get up and start walking again. It was the humanity of the people in the movie that affected me so much, their faces, eyes, expressions of fear, growing awareness. The dilemma of Jacob - do you keep on with the lie and give hope for a brief time only to have it shatter at the end, or do you back out of it and let the people die of hopelessness in the moment.

Nov. 17

Meeting with Mary Rose and Robert Philion at RCMP Headquarters. Robert was waiting for us at the door. He is very nice, and very honest. His blue eyes are frank and I was surprised by how willing he was to confide in us, to talk about his marriage, his shortcomings, how inadequate he feels in many conversations, how people are too fast for him or don't care to wait to see what he might have to say. I could sure relate to that! I liked him immediately for expressing this. It was a great chance to see Virgo and Gemini in action. Mary Rose is a Gemini and Robert talked a lot about Geminis and how slow and inadequate they make him feel. They had quite a back-and-forth dialogue going on between them – a great demonstration of the two energies.

Mary Rose: I have a Virgo friend who calls me up and I'm almost afraid to ask her how her day was because she'll tell me *everything*, like she got up, brushed her teeth. When she goes on a trip she tells me what flight it was, what they served for dinner ... who cares?

Robert: Who cares?! There you go. I always want to know these things and I ask these questions and Geminis always tell me, 'who cares.'

Mary Rose has no inhibitions about sharing her chart or her feelings with others and at one point Robert looked up and said, "Wow! I've never had a discussion like this before where we don't really know each other but can talk and talk like this, so personally." I felt it too, that there was a special quality about the blend of personalities that made a long personal talk like this possible. Robert so open, Mary Rose so effusive.

One of the things I like best about astrology is that it recognizes phases, cycles, transits in people's lives. It recognizes that people change, go through difficult times and accepts these changes for what they are. Nothing needs to be permanent- a low phase in life does not necessarily mean depression. Astrology is a system, a mode of expression that doesn't force people into being what they're not. Accepting situations as they are, or people for who they are is so difficult for humans to do and this is astrology can really help with that.

Mary Rose talked about her Saturn return and how sick she became until she realized that it was trying to conform to the expectations of society that made her so ill. Now she looks after children in her home and whole-heartedly studies astrology. She made many perceptive observations about Fred's chart, the cusps, the opposition between Sagittarius and Gemini, the Sun in the 3rd House to reinforce that Gemini moon. She said he had to oscillate through his dualities to find true meaning in his life through the details of his every day life, through communication. So the minutiae I have so little patience for really is important and meaningful to Fred.

The four of us talked until it grew dark and we stood in a circle outside the RCMP building exchanging phone numbers. "Here we all were, wondering about each other, what we would look like and ending up talking for four hours," Robert said in wonder. We gave Mary Rose a ride back to her apartment and she talked about the spiritualist church she had attended for a while. All in all quite a day.

**

After our meeting, Fred and I went to the Tangente on St-Laurent to see De Vaerstedet Vaerst and their dance-media-dream sequence, *El Nino*. A room with a light selecting, highlighting objects like in a de Chirico painting. A room of light and sound, responsive to every vibration. Darkness, then a weak spotlight on someone divining with an object resembling a Geiger counter, the sound of chanting, coming out of the background like fluids coming from the earth or the depths that appear when looking into the sea. Slow materialization.

A humming wire strung across the room, a violin bow, cables of yellow looping and slapping like bright waves, back and forth across the ocean, overseas telecommunication, the first phone calls from the US to England. Voices, noises from the larynx, eerie sounds through the wires. Dancing on a dock in the light of a full moon while a figure on the end signals with red flags. Currents, the sound of waves, wind. Storm, disturbance in the wires, the cables. The wind slaps the slats of a fence, the wood creaks, back and forth, back and forth. The hull of a ship.

Outline of a figure divided into separate strips of wood, divided, pieced back together, spinning in the wind. The human figure in the light finally seen behind the motion. Shadows looming up the sensitive wall, the talking wall, the wall vibrating like a larynx, dividing into shades of blue and pink, rippling, emanating seconds after creation.

**

So utterly bored with having to write stories for class. I want to create something like *El Nino*. Still blown away by that. But no, here I have to come up with characters and phony reasons to justify their actions and feelings all plotted on some kind of dramatic curve which is not relevant to anything. Shovelling enough filler to build one of these stories is frustrating, especially after the shining, singing images of *El Nino*.

Nov. 23

Went to see *Ballad of the Sad Café* at McGill. Fred was blown away by the play, talking about it afterwards the way I usually talk about something I like. It was haunting, melodic and seemed to form a continuity with *El Nino*, with a preoccupation with darkness, light, lost communication lines. The isolation of the townspeople who regularly gathered at the café was beautifully conveyed by the set and the eerie, subliminal music, which seemed to come from the inner depths. The set was transparent, a house created out of a gauzy material that sometimes looked like a net, sometimes fog and sometimes wood. It took on all the nuances and colour of the changing light and time; sunrise, sunset. In one scene I could see the outlines of the beams holding the building in place. I felt as if I could see right through to the structure, to the skeleton.

Paul Keenan's music floated in the background, repetitive, lingering, evocative like memories. The ghostly jew's harp added tension, building of emotions along with the summer's heat. Almost unbearable resonating luminosity, the swelling transparency of a vessel expanding with dark feelings for too long. I got a real sense of the way things cluster during a period of time, intensity, mood, atmosphere, events all converging in a moment.

Nov. 26

I look forward to going to class now, just because of my talks with Lila and Ira. Talked with Scott at break about transition periods and Steven Frank joined us. He says he's a worrier and doesn't have any self-confidence. He's exploring though, discovering new authors, styles, asking questions. I like Scott now. He cares and his criticisms are thorough and written with a warm human touch. He is also quite self-deprecating and will downgrade or keep quiet about his own writing and readings. As for my latest story, God was again merciful. It was Stoneface who attacked tonight.

Ira told Lila and me all about her new business venture, which had her going to three different banks, taking out three loans, buying herself a duplex and creating an office for herself. She says she is "building her independence." Her husband knows about the duplex but not about the office nor her intentions. I wonder if that was an arranged marriage. All around me women working, struggling, for their independence. "Who can write? When my mind is filled with dollars and cents," says harried Ira.

**

Colin responded to my letter - and what a response!

"Dear Lesley -

How wonderful to hear from you! Forgive me please for taking so long to reply, I've been flipping around like a human silverfish and some days have no time at all to sit down at my desk.

“I’m delighted to hear that you’re in touch with some of the people from the workshop and wish I’d known about the summer meetings as I was in Montréal last July for a week or so. What a group too – high-powered. Please give my very best to those you see – Ira, Lila, Stephen, Steven, Marc (where was Steven last August after all his famous speeches about coming out west?) - and any others.

“Sorry to hear about the boy’s club workshop. I’m sure you, Ira and Lila are the bright spots – you would be in any workshop – but are any of you still there? And what is the word from Stephen, Steven and Marc – are they still writing. I’d like very much to hear from any who’d like to write. Of course I was beginning to think I might soon see you and their stories in little magazines too.

“What you say about light is exciting. I don’t know Frame’s work, but I do know Davenport’s well and I agree with you – when he’s on he does send chills. I’ve read a recent story by him that suggests he’s as capable of awful and tedious writing as any of us are, but those early books I think are marvels. Have you read his collection of essays called *The Geography of the Imagination*? Quite terrific!

“But I want to see more of your work on light. Will you send me some of your new writing? I agree that when you become dissatisfied with old forms and haven’t yet found comfort in the new there’s a tendency to believe you’re dropping through space at an alarming rate. I’m attracted by your dream of the formula that mixed flesh and light and clearly it’s alchemical. Have you written anything out of that dream? A series of “portraits” say of what that alchemy moved you toward, because I guess that’s the next step – where you fly to.

“I’d love to see the words shining and vibrating in the air, and this seems something worth dedicating your life to. Don’t be discouraged by the Ten Commandments of the “Short story.” You’re right that they’re rigid because the “short story” is something like an ideological construct very much a part of its time – and the time it underpinned and made “sense of has passed.

“This is not to say prose, imaginative prose is a thing of the past, but that we must be open to the new forms prose takes singing through us. So, persevere, and i’d like to see, really, I mean it, what you’re doing.

“I’m going to be giving a workshop at the Kootenay School of Writing (Jan-March) which looks at new prose writing and I’ll send you a reading list if you like. As well – do you have Writing 12? Shall I send it to you as your first issue? I’ll close off here to get downtown early – and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Colin

(PS – I’ll be in Montréal in January – can we all meet then?)”

Dec. 3

Took Colin’s letter to class and gave it to Lila, Ira and Steven to read. The response to meeting Colin in January was YES YES YES. Steven was especially glad to hear from him and chuckled over the part about himself and his “famous speeches about going out west.” Steven says he is really is going out to Vancouver next week and I think I convinced him that Colin would sincerely like to see him. “How come he wrote to you? He always liked you best,” he said teasingly.

Back to earth. Scott talked about using the particular touch, the specific detail to get to the universal. His bias is toward conventional story, linear, chronological. But I do appreciate his compassion. He selects passages in my stories that are compassionate or sweet moments. He is also sincere and makes a great effort to be helpful. He also has a long memory. If you tell him something in class he will remember and bring it up again. He talked about expanding the linear structure so the deep concerns and personal details can be added. It is possible my frustration with writing stories is simply due to not having anything to say.

Enjoyable talk with Lila and Ira while waiting for Ira’s husband to pick us up. Surprised to hear that Ira doesn’t like Stephen (Schettini) much these days. He is in her script-writing class, takes the teacher out for lunches and dinners and the teacher always ends up paying. I agreed he is manipulative and told her how I didn’t trust him at first (and neither did Sally, Cathy, Darlene or Michèle). I came to like him much better during our summer meetings and feel he is a good critic – certainly more perceptive and open-minded than God and Stonehead, who hold this class in sway. Actually they were both unusually subdued today.

Ira's husband, Charlie, eventually showed up (what a pair) and Lila and I climbed into the back of the car. He pulled out in front of a bus and the headlights blinded us like searchlights. He looked worried and I had to fight down my fear. Ira asked us what we thought of the election and I said I never liked seeing any huge majority in power (Liberal sweep under Robert Bourassa). Mr Roth immediately agreed with me and said, "It's no good. Not good at all!" Ira told him that Lila is an English teacher at Dawson College. He asked her if the writing course was "meaningful" to her. Lila and I looked at each other, comically non-plussed. Lila stated firmly and thoughtfully, "Yes, yes I do," then she asked me the same question. Basically the only reason I'm still taking this course is that I have no other outlet for my interest in writing and no other way of connecting with people who share the same interest. So I guess it is meaningful in that respect. Ira got me off the hook by talking about "Jerusalem," the only workshop story I'm interested in rewriting.

Dec. 8

Fred and I went to a forum on Nazi war criminals and human rights at Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem Synagogue. This wasn't how we originally intended to spend the day, but nothing else worked out. The main sanctuary is lovely with warm golden lighting, the kind of mellow peace I used to feel at the Nazarene. Other small touches that delighted me. Deep blue Torah coverings with Hebrew lettering and stars, wonderful columns of light, shimmering purple. The nicest touch, however, was the menorah. The light cast a glow on the wall so you could see the shadow of the menorah and Star of David on top rising up the walls.

The faces fascinated me. A gallery of European faces, Polish, Russian, German, French, Dutch, English yet with a bond that transcends the nationalities and I was fascinated by the group dynamics. What a restless, rambunctious crowd. They did not hesitate to call out or loudly shush each other. The Chair could not call anyone to order. He tried and tried but was completely ignored. The forum had started half an hour late.

The Chair asked the group whether they should start now and shout, or wait until the microphone was fixed. “Start,” various people shouted. The Chair sat down and waited for the microphone. “He listens to us,” people sitting behind us grumbled. People poured into the room 30-40 minutes late. At first I thought Jim Mills would love this group, then decided he wouldn’t. They are always late and they do as they please, so Jim wouldn’t be able to make his point, demonstrate his power or whatever his issue is with punctuality. He would not stand out.

The speakers were articulate, Professor Irwin Cotler especially passionate. No talk of revenge – in fact, sometimes it seemed as if they were bending over backwards to find reasons not to hate, not to seek revenge. Cotler talked about refugees from other countries who might benefit from the neglect of the Jews in the years after WWII; good coming out of bad. Energy channeled into reconstruction. A Ukrainian man stood up to speak into the microphone, so nervous his hands were shaking and his words came out in a torrent. The man, who was against the Deschênes Commission inquiry on war criminals, was applauded three times just for having the courage to stand up and speak.

Not long after the Ukrainian man left, a woman took the microphone and spoke very emotionally about the “chutzpah” of the man “in coming here and speaking out like that.” She was a child survivor from the Ukraine and that made all the difference in the world. It is so easy to be liberal, tolerant, democratic when you’ve never been tested. The survivors are buffered, treated gently and always there are people around them. They form a separate group within the larger group and their perspective is understood by everyone. After this woman revealed she was a child survivor, the tension in the room broke; she was understood.

Keith Spicer wore a kippa and talked about growing up with parents who were Orange Lodge, anti-Jew, anti-Catholic, anti-French, anti-everything, and his struggle in life to overcome it. The applause was again resounding. But I noticed that when he mentioned the Orange Lodge, there was a subtle but palpable drawing back. I uttered an expression of surprise and later, Fred told me about half a dozen people had done the same. We stayed for the Chanukah candle-lighting. Everyone stood, crooned in Hebrew – then raced to the latkes.

Dec. 15

ASM party at Joyce Jason's house. The house is beautifully decorated and it seems as if a lot of people interested in so-called new age ideas are extremely wealthy. Met Carolyn Springer who has a lovely wistful Piscean face. She really hit it off with Robert Philion. Robert amused everyone by telling anyone who would listen how shy he was, yet he was always the centre of attention. Susan, Fred, Carolyn, Ron and I stayed in the kitchen and were regaled with stories and opinions by Pat Taylor. We ended up being the last to leave the party although we had been the most detached. After the party, F and I went to the Croissant de lune and it felt like a warm little cave in this season of darkness. The snow has hardened into troglodytes, cacti, moonscapes.

Then to the Jewish Public Library to hear stories of child survivors and then to the Holocaust Memorial Centre to see the Children of the Holocaust memorial. There was a man there with his family just ahead of us. He pointed to some of the photographs and described to his companions who the people in the photos were and what had been done to him. It was eerie. He described the people and events as if he were pointing out people and places in a college yearbook. For me it is this everyday, universal bond that floors me. The man pointed at a map and explained that the camp where he was was not named on the map because it only had 20,000 people in it.

There was also a photo of tonight's Chair, Mony Fromowitz (?) in the exhibit, and again I was stunned by the understatement, the matter-of-factness of the caption. Mony is leaning against his mother and the caption says, "Mony has malnutrition and cannot stand by himself." It's the blending of horror and the everyday that strikes me with such force. To hear a man describing a prison camp the way I might talk about a university dorm. As for the photos, the newspaper clippings, the anti-Semitic propaganda, there is nothing I can say that hasn't been said by better writers. Sickening.

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Dinner with Fred's friends Dave and Claire. At one point Fred mentioned the Deschênes Commission inquiry on war criminals and Dave said, "Of course it was extended. Some people have all the money and will never forget – or let anyone else forget."

Dec. 20

Life seems like *the Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Events are illuminated and then fall into darkness again. People appear and disappear. On the way to Kingston on a cold dark bus. Two people asked the driver to turn on the lights and twice he flicked them on and then off again. Finally after an hour, he decided to turn them on. Reading Danilo Kiš's *Garden, Ashes*, huddled in my black cloak. The book is wonderful, full of dark and fantastic images, the Twentieth Century world that has split into pieces and reconstructed. John and Dave Clark met me at the bus terminal. It was like setting foot on another planet. I was stunned by the cold and by three hours of total immersion in a fantastic surreal world.

Wheeze in domestic mode, preparing food and showing us posed photos of herself and John. Candles glowing, classical music playing. Dave Clark is an interesting character. He is a librarian, meticulous in appearance, extremely detail-oriented. Penetrating with a retentive mind. Anything you say to him he will remember and recall it later. He has an MA in genetics and seems to have attended a few universities. He is currently working as a librarian. He, Marsha and I became absorbed in a strange movie until Sharon arrived.

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Sharon and I spent all afternoon together shopping. I forgot how intense Sharon can be. Marsha sees more of that side of her than I usually do. We had a good long talk and then on to a party at Eileen's where Sharon blasted everyone for being middle class. The chemistry between people was odd all weekend. I was basically not much more than a furniture-warmer. Marsha manipulated to spend all her free time with Dave Clark. Sharon and I were left to our own devices, neither able to cope with this tidal wave of emotion building inside her.

After Dave left, Marsha and Fred went for a drive while Sharon and I had another long talk. She talked about getting professional help, how she didn't think she was ready to socialize. She also talked about how much grief she has sublimated so instead of feeling better, she feels worse. Marsha and Fred had talked on their drive, and it was too bad the two sides hadn't known each other's discussions.

We drove Sharon back to Prescott and after we dropped her off, Fred launched into a tirade about Sharon, her behaviour, how much stress she was putting on Marsha – basically, she should be over it by now. I disagreed and we pulled off the road to have this fight. I have written very poorly, disjointedly about the weekend. Perhaps that is the only way to write about it.

Dec. 23

An odd occurrence. We had arranged to go to a dinner at Fred's mother's place. Fred didn't want to go because he was tired. When he called his mother to tell her, she started to cry and said this was the worst thing he could do to her. Fred would not back down, and because I have never known her to cry, I mediated – something I never do. I called her and said Fred hadn't meant what he said, I had agreed we would go and so we would keep our word.

Eric's girlfriend, Toni, picked me up and we talked cheerfully on the drive to Beaconsfield. Once we arrived I was completely baffled and more than a little irritated. I do not know what the fuss was about. F's mother was as usual when we arrived. The dinner was fine. No one said anything too offensive. Fred's brother Bob didn't attack anyone. I was ignored as usual, which means not having to come up with small-talk. Same old-same old. So why the tears?

I enjoyed the rapport between Eric and Toni. Kathy was also not so bad tonight. I discovered we have the same opinion on a number of things, and she said she's not always able to hide her true feelings either. In fact, in spite of her perfect daughter-in-law appearance, she is sharper and more sarcastic to Fred's mother than I have ever been. Yet I continue to be the black sheep. I guess as long as you can balance the ball on the end of your nose it doesn't matter what you actually say or do.

Dec. 24

Reading Julio Cortazar's book, *The Winners*. Very appropriate for these Christmas journeys. Characters milling, combining, falling into and creating surreal events, and the sense of being controlled from the outside. You are here now, only for the moment and not really participating on a deep level. Here in the book is the same suspension of time or place, so that, as at Christmas, where you are in other people's hands, every person, event, conversations stands out on its own. (I think I have got completely lost here.) They are all heightened moments, shots of emotion with no time to gather strength or reflect. Strange, disconnected yet also fated series of events. The book really fit the journey.

I always enjoy the trip through Toronto, up the 400. Shivery feeling of isolation, flight, snow transmitting light in the darkness. Trucks glimmer ahead. Headlights, shadows. I never know what to expect in Barrie and when we reach Bradford my stomach always starts churning.

Warm welcome from my parents, but my father's voice was weak. He looks so small and vulnerable now. His hair is grey and his hands are a disturbing purplish colour. Blood pressure? Intelligent talk about the Québec election. My father liked Johnson and was impressed by his dignity and education. He remarked that Johnson was both a doctor and a lawyer.

Dec. 28

Visited Toronto and enjoyed seeing Queen Street again. Had a nice Caesar salad at Cultures in the Beaches. How is this for realism, precise detail and particulars. Surely God and Stoneface couldn't accuse me of "weak specificity" now! The yuppies have now spread past the Woodbine line and it is so odd seeing renovated duplexes, fern bars, stained glass boutiques right across from a race track.

Felt like a circus performer trying to juggle the Boot and Sharon. I don't think Boot has any idea how demanding she is. Why is it so difficult for her to understand that I have friends I want to see. When I mentioned wanting two hours to myself to drop in on Sharon, Boot curled her lip, practically snarled at me.

If I were her, I would have jumped at the chance to spend two hours alone in Toronto without being dragged into second-hand bookstores and weird cafés. But she is not me and to be honest, I truly don't understand her. She simply won't make any effort to get along with other people, and it seems she has just decided she hates my friends. Is it jealousy? The pouting, the sulking, the bottled up resentment/aggression that creates static, a silence that isn't there. When we're by ourselves we can have a lot of fun, but am I not allowed to see anyone except her?

Sharon was having her Elrond reunion tea party today. Maybe I should have stuck with the Boot. I couldn't see my way out of the party so I went to Sharon's apartment. She walked around with a fixed expression on her face, a look of withdrawal. There are times when she seems to withdraw to the point where the lifelines are cut off and the oxygen tanks are barely functioning. She came alive while she was talking to me and Mr Woolley.

I have no connection with any of these people. They were not my Elrond friends, but that doesn't mean I'm going to sit in a corner and sneer or snarl at them! Pete Yee looked exactly the same, a serene Peter Pan. We shook hands and went our separate ways. David Wood and Helen Woolley also looked exactly the same. Flo Watson presided over the food tables, being quite charming, telling stories about her friends. Met Flo's parents and sister Greer. Oh my. They are extremely, aridly British. Flo speaks just as bluntly to her father as she does to anyone else. Sharon is right about Mrs Watson. It is difficult to picture her as holding such a high position in the academic world as she does look and dress like a housewife. Mr Woolley is a cute Englishman enjoying his drink and being opinionated.

Sharon gave Fred Ernie's thousand dollar radio for Christmas and he feels guilty about it. We tend to think of Sharon as being close with money but she often makes generous gestures with no strings attached. You always know where you stand when she gives you something. I appreciate the realism and matter-of-factness to her gift-giving, unlike Jim and Val, who used gifts as manipulation and made me dread receiving them, always wondering how I was supposed to pay them back. Boot in good spirits on the drive back to Barrie. I guess I managed to keep my pins in the air.

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Visited my parents, then to Orillia to visit the Professor and Ron. The Pyes have indeed move, as I already knew through Sir Jefforie. They've only been in this duplex for a couple of weeks but everything is beautiful, graceful, meticulously arranged. At first I was disconcerted because none of the familiar objects I associate with Janet were out, but she explained these objects were "only the first things I pulled out of a box." A bit startled by the weight she has put on. Not because she looks bad, far from it, it suits her. I'm a bit worried because I know she has always hated her body and caricatured it and joked about being a blob. I hope she feels good about it. I think it suits her. There is something lavish, luxurious, Venusian about her. She has let her hair grown and feels very strongly about keeping the silver in it. She has always been attracted to older people and like me, is so much happier at this age than she ever was as a child. Her skin is smooth and creamy, her sense of colour, decor and harmony exquisite.

I regaled Janet and Ron with BHCL stories over dinner. The Professor's sense of humour is as keen as ever. She has a lot of pride, which is why she plays the buffoon and can be so self-deprecating. It's the feeling of beating other people to the punch. Her humour is never directed against other people – only herself. With others, it is mischievous, Puckish, or a mocking of the arrogant, stupid, hypocritical and most of all, an antidote against the pettiness and small humiliations of life.

Interesting talk about photography. She has given up photography for a while because she found that the image would talk over. She said she became obsessed with capturing something lovely on film to the point where she couldn't just see it and appreciate its existence. The image became more important than the living scene. At one point Janet took me into the downstairs bedroom and showed me the purples and blues she is experimenting with, the lace covers concealing the pipes. She pointed these out to me with a real note of pride, which was really nice to hear. She praised my black coat and its flowing lines. I felt very close to her and we parted with a feeling of warmth. Surrounding oneself with beauty is an act of courage.

Dec. 29

Phone call from Susan Kelly about getting together to make posters for the ASM conference. We ended up talking about the holidays. I told her a little bit about Fred's mother crying on the phone, Sharon in Kingston, my father's health, the terrible trios, Marsha, Sharon and me; Boot, Sharon and me. I also told her how draining it is to go to Barrie, how it feels a little bit like walking into a cannibal feast and realizing I'm the dinner. Susan's mother and sister live in California and they talked on the telephone. She used to visit her father and would knock herself out trying to create a happy time for him, making him meals and being cheerful. But he would always be melancholy and she never felt she made a difference. It became so draining she doesn't go any more. We talked about the sentimentality people are barraged with from TV. How could any holiday live up to such idealization?

Her Christmas had been Uranian. She heard all kinds of noises in her apartment, the sounds of someone walking across a balcony, back and forth, back and forth. Her first instinct was to hide, but then she ventured out to see what it was. There was a monk pacing back and forth on her balcony, dressed in a dark robe and hood. When she finally opened the door to speak to him, she realized it was not really a monk but a gay neighbour dressed in a hooded bathrobe. He was pacing around on her balcony because he had locked himself out and her light was on. She invited him in to warm up and have coffee until they could find the concierge. But - a monk pacing a balcony! That's better than the tuba player under our window.

Oh yes. I received a Christmas card from Val, enigmatic, typically unique, which said in her rushed calligraphy, "Expect me when you see me." Sounds like a threat.